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Father in modern story

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## **FATHER IN MODERN STORY**



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# FATHER IN MODERN STORY

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*Edited by*

**MAUD VAN BUREN**

*and*

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MODERN STORY," "MOTHER IN MODERN STORY,"  
"THANKSGIVING IN MODERN STORY," AND  
"EASTER IN MODERN STORY."

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*To the memory of our fathers*

MARTIN VAN BUREN

*and*

JASON WOOD BEMIS



## PREFATORY NOTE

In response to many repeated requests from both librarians and readers, the editors have added this collection "Father in Modern Story" to the Modern Story series, to serve the many all-year occasions featuring father as well as the specially designated "Father's Day."



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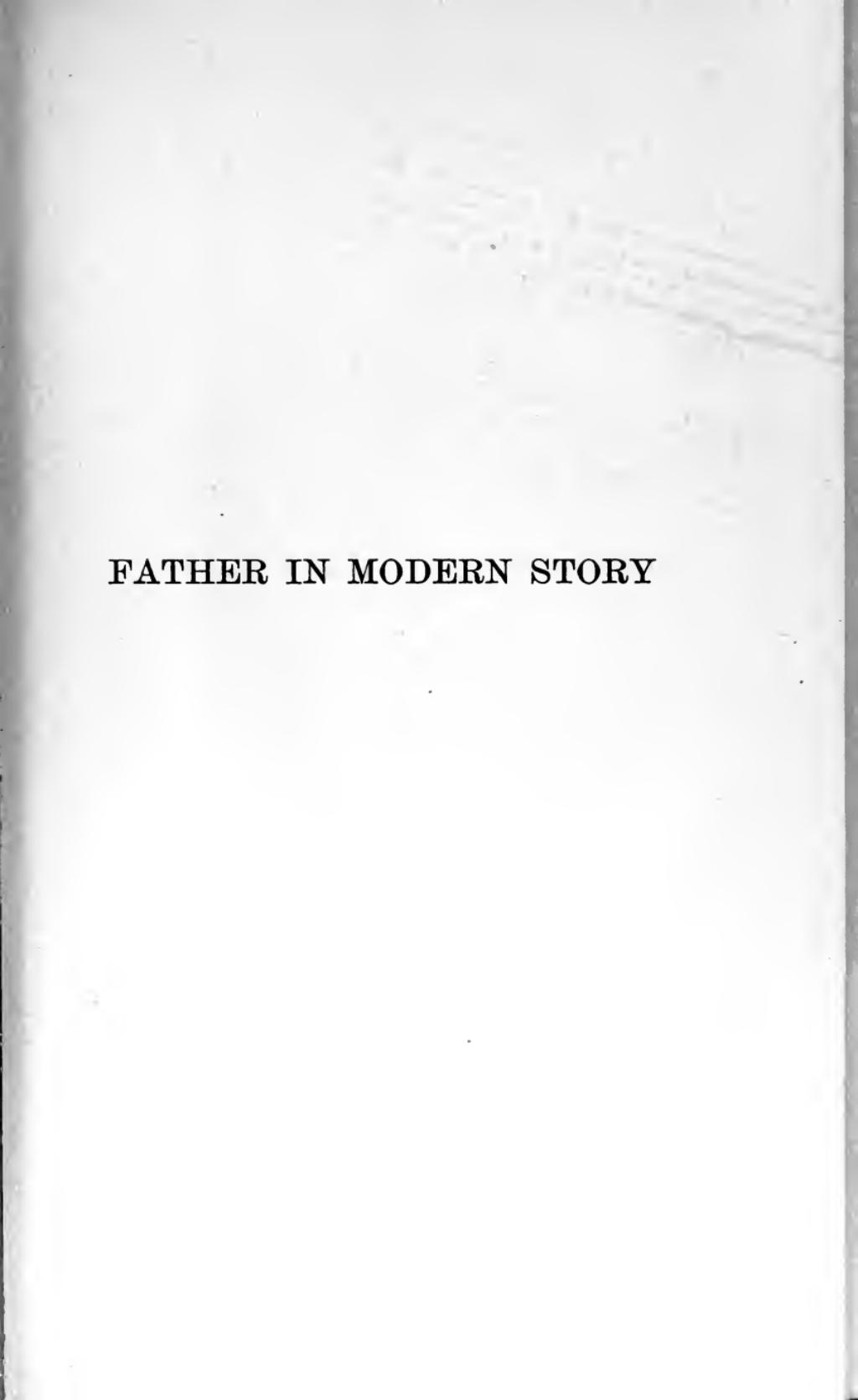


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A faint, horizontal watermark or illustration is visible across the page, depicting a landscape scene with trees and a winding path or stream.

## FATHER IN MODERN STORY



## FATHER MASON RETIRES \*

*Bess Streeter Aldrich*

EVENTS moved rapidly in the Mason household, as they always do when the children reach womanhood and manhood. It is the young themselves who welcome the changes. Only the parents reach out impotent hands that would fain hold the little ones back from their journeying. One day all seems shouting and confusion and hurrying of little feet to and fro. Almost the next there is silence and peace—a silence that is stifling, a peace that is painful. It is an age-old tragedy—the Passing of the Children.

There was a double wedding of the sisters, Katherine to Keith Baldridge, Marcia to John Wheeler. "Mother," Marcia said on the wedding day, "it took Kathie over a year to know for sure she cared for Keith; but—don't you be shocked and don't you *dare* tell a soul—I could have married John *eleven* minutes after I met him."

Mother looked up, laughing. "Kathie's conservative, like Father; and you're impulsive, like me." Then she flushed to the roots of her graying hair and added, "Don't you be shocked, and don't you dare tell a soul; I knew I wanted Father long before he knew he liked me."

\* From "Mother Mason," by Bess Streeter Aldrich. Reprinted by permission of D. Appleton & Company, publishers.

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The wedding of the two girls was a particularly distressing event to Father. He could not think of the girls as anything but little tots. "Seems like they ought to be wearing pinafores yet," he said to Mother. He wandered aimlessly, lonesomely, round the big house on the eventful day. Only his position of host made him attempt any cheerfulness. He had nothing to do, was in the road, in fact. "Isn't there something I can help with?" he asked. "I'll do anything but wear a dress suit." There was nothing; but he stayed on doggedly, as one clings to a sinking ship.

Mother was all smiles and bustling energy. Father watched her in amazement. Was it possible she didn't care as deeply as he? Ah, Father, little you knew!

There were palms and flowers and a caterer from Capitol City. To be sure, Mother and Tillie could have baked things that tasted better; but every woman wants a caterer once in her life. The time for the ceremony came. Katherine, sweet, womanly, Madonna-like—Marcia, flushed, starry-eyed, lovely—both visions in their white gowns and flowing veils. But something was the matter with Father's vision. He couldn't seem to see them as they appeared to the rest of the company. Katherine persisted in skipping along down the street to meet him, her smooth braids bobbing out behind her. Marcia kept pelting him with twigs and leaves, peering down roguishly from the old apple tree through a tangle of curls. There was a lump in Father's throat all evening as big as a china egg. King and banker, and ancient arrow maker, all utter the same thing: "Thus it is our daughters leave us!"

But after the girls were gone Father slipped com-

fortably back into the old routine, and Mother was the one who seemed to grow restless. She was tired, she said: she wished they could go away somewhere.

"Why don't you let up a little, Father?" she would ask. "You've been tied to that bank all these years, and how many vacations have you ever taken?"

"The few times I did take them," Father returned, "I was like a fish out of water."

"But it's different now," Mother protested. "You're getting old, and if any one is entitled to take things easy, you surely are."

Mother kept at him so persistently that it gradually began to seem an alluring picture to Father: not to be tied down, not to have to work any more. When Satan took the Man of Galilee up into a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world it is not recorded that he held out the delightful promise that no work would ever have to be done, but it is quite possible that this was part of the temptation.

So Father commenced to think about getting out of his harness. He was where he could take things easy if he chose. Surreptitiously he began filling the backs of old envelopes with figures, estimating what he could get from his bank stock if he sold. Other scraps of paper bore the figures of investments he would make, what his income would be. Yes, he could retire and live quite comfortably. He wouldn't sell the hundred and sixty. Like a great many men in whose veins runs the blood of pioneers, he felt more secure with a little farm land he could always fall back on.

Evenings when the two were alone he began to speak quite casually to Mother about what they could do if

• FATHER MASON RETIRES •

they sold. He was very conservative, was Father. It had never been his way to go off half-cocked. Mother, who was by nature an enthusiast, less level-headed than Father, fairly bubbled with plans. Would they be fixed so they could afford a year of travel? It would be better for Eleanor than college, a great experience for Junior. They could close the house. Tillie could work for Bob and Mabel. And Father, figuring and figuring, said he guessed they could manage it all right. By common consent they said nothing before Eleanor and Junior. The children couldn't quite be trusted with such astounding plans until they were perfected.

So Mother got out books of travel and maps. She sent for information on personally conducted tours and found herself promptly deluged with literature. She spoke magic names glibly, names that hitherto had seemed as far removed from their lives as scenes from Arabian Nights—the Mediterranean, Venice, the Alps.

“I’ve dreamed of it all my life! Think of it, Father, to set out to sea—with the coast lights growing fainter—and the spray—and the sky meeting the water!”

“Yes, I’d like it too,” said Father.

So Father listed the Springtown First National Bank at a topnotch price with the Van Orden Company at Miles City. And in a short time one of the Van Ordens swung around the bank corner in a big touring car with two men, a short, red-faced man and a younger one, whom he introduced as the Coles. They talked long and seriously in the little back office. Father had Bob bring in files from the various cases. Together they went over bunches of notes and mortgages. Father, in reserved, dignified pride, showed

them everything. There was nothing to conceal, for there was not a five-dollar loan that was poor paper. Father's house was in order.

"It's a h— of a price," said Cole, Senior.

"It's a good bank," said Father simply.

And thereafter at any threat on Cole's part not to consider the big price, Father would reiterate: "That's the price. Take it or leave it." Father was nobody's fool.

But the whole thing began to get on his nerves. Partly from the dislike of the ranting, stamping Cole, and partly from a natural indignation at seeing a stranger assume an air of ownership in his old office, he grew tired of the deal. It irritated him whenever that big touring car swung around the corner and the men came bustling in. For they came many times. It takes longer to buy even a country bank than it does a kitchen range.

After one long session of discussion, suddenly, like a violin string snaps, Cole said he would take it. After which he swaggered about Father's office, swore a little, and spoke of changes he would make in the working policy, changes in the force, changes in the fixtures. Then, with the agreement that Father was to come to Miles City on the following Wednesday to sign the contracts, he left.

In the intervening days the transaction began to prey upon Father's mind. It was as though there yawned at his feet a deep and wide fissure in the good old earth. He did not sleep well. He minced his food—Father, who had partaken of three hearty meals a day for years. The memory of Old Man Hanson persist-

ently haunted him—the old man in Cedar County who had sold his home farm and then committed suicide.

Mother tried several times to arouse his enthusiasm over their coming year, but, sensing his preoccupied mind, she, too, grew reserved.

He began to brood over the thing, to think of it as a colossal mistake. What would he do, he asked himself, when he returned from that year's trip? He looked across the street to where a dozen men were sitting on boxes and kegs in front of Sol Simon's store, talking, chewing, whittling. There were farmers among them who were retired and town men who were merely tired. Some were real old men. Some were—fifty-nine. Father shuddered.

Wednesday loomed before him, big and black and fiendish like the end of everything. The gates that he had persuaded himself were to swing open to Freedom seemed now to his obsessed mind to clang in upon him, prison-like. The only way that he could get out of the deal was to pay the big commission. Also, he had given his word, and the occasion had yet to occur when a man could say Henry Y. Mason had broken his word.

Tuesday afternoon, as he waited upon a few old-time patrons, he felt like a traitor to be turning these good old men over to that hot-headed, tempery Cole. The deal no longer seemed even legitimate. Benedict Arnold and Judas Iscariot had made like transactions.

When they closed up, Father lingered in his office. He felt dazed, a little sick. He couldn't just place his illness. It might be his stomach, he wasn't sure.

Bob was outside waiting for him.

"Better have a good lawyer with you, Dad," he suggested. "Judge Cumming or J. T. Neftt."

"No," said Father shortly; "I can hold my own."

Most of the night he lay awake, turning and turning. To Mother's solicitous inquiry he said irritably, "It's my corn. The one on my left foot," he added specifically.

They were both up by daylight. Mother got breakfast—buckwheat cakes and country sausage and coffee. Father was none of your grapefruit, French toast people. But he did not eat much.

"You'll come home to-night without any ball and chain," Mother said. "You'll be a free man."

"Yes," he agreed in a thin voice, and then added cheerfully for Mother's sake, "Yes, sure!"

On the way to the early morning train he stopped at the bank. As he unlocked and went in to get his little black grip with its important papers, he looked neither to the right nor the left, getting out hurriedly as one steps out from the room where the dead lie sleeping. He had an uncanny feeling that the old brick building was staring reproachfully after him. A block away he yielded to a childish desire and looked behind him. It was true. He had never noticed before how much the two big plate-glass windows looked like eyes.

On the train he dropped into a seat and stared mechanically out at the familiar water tank and lumber yard. Across the aisle two men were having a friendly argument over some minor point in the policies of National and State banks. One of them turned. "Here's Mason of Springtown," he said. "Ask him. He knows

. FATHER MASON RETIRES .

the subject like a kid's primer." Father made a half-hearted remark or two, excused himself and went into the smoker. He felt hurt, out of it.

"Mason isn't looking very fit," one of them volunteered.

"Probably breaking," the other returned. "It gets us all after a while."

At Miles City he went immediately to the Van Ordens'. In their private office were the two Van Ordens, the two Coles, two attorneys, and a stenographer. That made seven. And Father!

"Now, gentlemen, let's get right down to business." It was one of the Coles.

Father's hands and feet were as cold as ice, but his head felt clear and his mind singularly active.

The contract was being written. "We want," said Cole, "a clause whereby Mason will be required to take over any paper that we decide we want to throw out in the first six months."

"No," said Father firmly, "I won't agree to that."

"It's a legitimate proposition," said Cole snapishly.

"Rather customary," agreed one of the Van Ordens.

"A mighty small matter," put in the other Cole; "if the paper's all good."

"No," said Father doggedly. He was sighting a hole, a very small hole through which the sun was shining. If he could only get them to drop it off their own accord.

Cole was getting mad. "I insist on the clause." He thumped the table. He was used to having his way, could not bear to be crossed.

Like a bulldog Father hung on grimly. "No," he repeated quietly.

The Van Ordens worked like Chinese go-betweens. They worked until they sweat. Finally Cole swore a long hyphenated oath. He stood up, red and hot. "The deal's off," he said loudly.

"All right," said Father quietly. "Deal's off."

The Van Ordens came to Father. They were sorry, apologetic. They did not blame him by any means, and they would be glad to make another deal.

"No," Father told them; "it isn't for sale now."

Father was down in the bustling street, his little weather-beaten grip held tightly in his hand. Street cars were clanging by. Boys were calling the noon edition. The sun was struggling to shine through the fog and the smoke. The old First National was still his. Only a few times in his life had he experienced this same sensation of relief from catastrophe: the time the panic so nearly caught him; the straightening out of an unfounded rumor that Bob had been mixed up in a disgraceful college scrape; the time Eleanor passed the crisis in pneumonia. He looked up through the murky haze, past the tops of the tall office buildings. "Good Lord!" he ejaculated aloud. It was the nearest to a public prayer Father had ever come. He felt young. He was only fifty-nine, and he had thought of retiring! He, who had health and strength and energy, had been about to commit himself voluntarily to the rubbish pile! A dull red spread over his face. He was ashamed of himself. Ten, fifteen, twenty years from now he could quit.

He turned and with long steady strides walked down

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the street, out of the business section, through a park, past lovely homes, out where the houses were scattering. At the very edge of the last suburb he stopped and looked out across the wide stretch of fields and meadows, asleep now under a powdery quilt of snow. A verse of Coleridge's lying dormant in his mind, long forgotten, came suddenly to him.

"And winter slumbering in the open air  
Wears on his smiling face a dream of spring;  
I the while, the sole unbusy thing,  
Nor honey make, nor pair, nor build, nor sing."

"Work is good," he said to himself. "Work is healthful and right. It keeps men sane and well balanced. No one with health and strength should step out of the ranks. He should be, as Emerson says, 'Too busy with the crowded hour to fear to live or die.' "

For a few moments longer he stood wrapped in thought. Then hunger seized him, a good, healthy, ravenous hunger, the first he had felt in weeks. He walked rapidly back to the car line and rode downtown.

It was nearly midnight when Father got into Springtown on Number Nine. To city dwellers a train is a means of locomotion. To small-town people it is an individual. They call it "she," and speak pridefully of her when she is on time and vindictively when she is late. Father got off the Number Nine, which was only a few minutes late, and swung away up Main Street. His heart was tender and he felt a yearning over all the dark old houses. He must do something for Springtown, something useful.

By the bank door he paused and then, at the risk of being mistaken for a burglar by old Sandy Wright, the night watchman, he unlocked and went in. Back in his private office he sat down at his desk and looked about him. Everything was his; the business, the fixtures, the furnishings, the very calendars. Nothing belonged to Cole—nothing. It was like the relief after nightmare. For some time he sat there, making new plans. The boys all ought to have their salaries raised. They were good boys. With a little figuring it could be done. His eyes fell upon a huge bill above the desk. It told of Henry Schnormeir's dispersion sale, scheduled for the next day. He'd clerk at that sale, himself, thought Father. He'd tell D.T. he wanted to do it.

It was not until he had locked the door and started toward home that he gave a definite thought to Mother's attitude. It struck him forcibly that Mother's disappointment would probably be keen. She had wanted to take a trip like that all her life. Well, she and the children should go, anyway. He could stay at Bob's.

Mother was still up. It was an old trick of Mother's. "Seems like I can't go to sleep comfortably until every one is in," she would say. She put up her book now and looked questioningly at Father. "Well?" She was placid, serene. "How did everything go? Did you have a hard day?"

"Oh, no, not very." Father put it off a moment longer. Then he plunged bravely in with "Well, Mother, the deal's off. Fallen through."

"Fallen through?" she repeated wonderingly. "I didn't know it *could* fall through now."

"Yes, we stuck on a clause in the contract. The old

bank's still ours, and there'll be no long trip for me this year."

Suddenly, surprisingly, Mother burst into tears. Of all people to go off like that! Mother, who was not the crying kind! She was disappointed, then, to the very core. Father opened his mouth to tell her that she and the children should take the trip anyway, but Mother spoke first. "Oh, Henry," she wailed, "I never meant to b-bawl like this—but you don't know how *glad* I am. I've been just *sick* about it the last two weeks, but I never let on to you. I got to wondering if you'd be contented with nothing to do—and I got to thinking about going in a b-boat that might leak—and the family all being separated—and *Christmas* and *birthdays*—oh, I just couldn't *stand* it. A whole year! Why, *anything* might happen, Henry. Katherine or Marcia might even have a *b-baby* and their own *mother* far away. Home *never* looked so good to me."

Astonished, Father sat down limply in his big leather chair. "Can you *beat* it?" he asked faintly.

Father clerked at the Schnormeir sale. All day long, in his old moth-eaten Galloway coat, dilapidated cap, and hip boots, he stood ankle deep in soft mud and took the farmers' notes. In unoccupied moments he would lift his head and inhale long deep breaths of the wind that swept over the prairie, the wind that was laden with earth-odors, the good old smells of loam and clod and subsoil. It caressed his cheeks and nostrils, and whispered of the coming of purple-flowered alfalfa, and rustling corn and shimmering, swaying wheat heads. It is to the son of the prairie what the clear cold breeze from the snow-capped peaks is to the

mountaineer, what the wet, salt-filled wind is to the sailor.

At night, tired, dirty, contented, Father rode home in a little mud-spattered rattling auto with two farmers, a stockman, and a railroad section hand. He was very democratic, was the president of the First National Bank of Springtown.

As he got out at home and passed around to the rear of the house, he saw Mother in the cob-house. Nearly every small-town home in the corn-bearing district possesses such a building. It is ostensibly for cobs, but also serves splendidly for a catch-all. At the sight of Mother in the doorway, Father tried desperately to conceal something down at his side. But the thing was too large. Mother glared coldly, inhospitably at it. It was a bird cage. The seed dishes were cracked. The perches were broken. A crow could have escaped through the rusty bent bars.

"Nobody bid on it," said Father sheepishly.

"Most *presumably* not," returned Mother with dry sarcasm. Then she threw back her head and laughed, a gay bubbling laugh, so that Father felt immensely relieved, and grinned too. "Never mind, Father," she spoke with mock sympathy, "I've got one old hen that wants to set. It'll be just the thing to put her in."

They were back in the old comfortable rut, the dear old routine of living. Let the discontented sail the salt seas looking for high adventure! Let the dissatisfied climb the highest peak searching for the nesting place of the bluebird of happiness! To Father and Mother Mason, adventure beckoned alluringly with every sun that rose over the far distant wooded hills

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and rolling prairie land. Contentment lay in the place they had made for each other and for the children. They were good folks, kind folks, simple-hearted folks—and God give us more!—to whom it would not have mattered greatly if, instead of the big comfortable house with its ample rooms and sunny porches, there had been but a poor wee hut tucked away somewhere out of the wind and rain, for with willing hands and loving hearts, they would have made of it—HOME.

## MR. NOBODY \*

*Llewellyn Hughes*

THE late November rain had turned toward evening into a driving sleet from the northeast; and under the shelter of one of the company's storage sheds, damp and foul with the smell of hides, the lading-clerk of the River Horne Line Company was shivering. From somewhere the half-hour chimes of a clock came mournfully through the night. Pulling his hat well down over his ears Herbert Simmons set out against the driving rain, praying the pain in his chest would get no worse. He could of course take a Bridge bus, then transfer; but that meant an extra fare, and sheer necessity forced him to adhere to a shilling per week allowance for bus-rides.

It was the same homeward journey he had taken regularly for over four years. He knew every cracked and broken flagstone of the pavements, every shop and sign-post; from force of habit he cut across intervening streets and lanes precisely at the same spot. Gusts of cold rain curved and twisted about him, poured down on him from a screeching dance around a chimney-pot, flung round a near-by corner right into his face, and swept up again to do the same thing all over further along the way.

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The vague fancy that there were two Herbert Simmonses returned to him. One was already home. The other, spectral and strangely dissatisfied, lagged behind. He had been dimly conscious of the thing once or twice before. The other Herbert Simmons whispered of things far beyond his grasp, was bitterly envious for money, luxuries, wanted to hide aboard one of those South American tramps and go sailing away, deserting all cares, responsibilities. Just now, however, it was on a different tack. *You are near the end of your tether, Herbert Simmons. You ain't ever going to do anything worth while in this life. Look how your feet drag. It's too late for America and a new start. You're about done for, Herbert Simmons.*

For a moment he gave himself utterly over to his shadow, and, doing so, in a swift attack of miserable dissatisfaction, reviewed his whole life: one of nine children, his father's awful death, his tramp to London, the job as milk-wagon boy, the years in that grocery shop, his meeting with Ethel, the saving up of fifteen pounds with which to get married and start a home, the first child, the second, the . . . The wind shrieked with laughter at him. Even in France, during the war, his life had been absolutely colorless, gray, gray as the rain, the heavens. It hadn't been for the want of trying, for the want of ambition; but he simply couldn't think of anything by which he could change himself, remedy his awful insignificance. Once, in a second of glorious exhilaration, he had volunteered for the job of crawling through barbed wire and bombing an enemy outpost; but even that was denied him; a countermanding order withdrew his battalion before

his chance came. Now he was resigned to a more or less hopeless belief that he would meet, suddenly, round some corner or other, a new and startling development into which he would eagerly precipitate himself. He had no clear notion what this development might be, but it had fame and fortune in it, a garden with roses, a car . . .

The wind-swept rain tearing down a street he was crossing almost knocked him down. Immersed in his thoughts, Herbert Simmons had entirely lost track of his whereabouts and to his surprise was compelled to look up at the name on the brick wall. It was Nightingale Lane. Another whisper, coming from somewhere, made him dizzy. Why not turn up Nightingale Lane instead of continuing along St. Katherine's Way? Why not, for once in his life, go absolutely contrary to the monotonous clockwork of his habits? Why not, here and now, break away from that insignificant automaton of a lading-clerk known as Simmons? The mere fancy of it so exhausted him that he had to lean against the wall for support. He had an idea he was the only soul abroad in the whole of London and that against him the raging elements pitted all their strength and fury. Down Nightingale Lane came the storm's legions, a phantom cavalry, their smoking limbs and draperies rising to incredible heights in contortions of jealousy. They charged him as they would a discarded rag, insistent on tearing him, an unknown lading-clerk, up and away, to whirl him on to some distant rubbish-heap. Spellbound, he likened them to the obscure forces that in life kept him in the background, sealed him in the ranks of mere nobodies.

Why not oppose them? Why not clench his fists and smash into them? Yes, go up Nightingale Lane and on and on through this opposition to some Arcadia just beyond, for which a stirring in his breast indeterminately ached. Past Bethnal Green, past the last few houses on the outskirts. . . .

He shook his head as though it were all hopelessly beyond his understanding, then resumed his way, along Lower Thames Street, across London Bridge, head bowed, hands thrust deep into pockets, a solitary figure, homeward bound, step by step taking him nearer the little circle of wife and children. On the other side of the Thames he got an Elephant and Castle bus, parted with one of his three remaining pennies, and settled down to think of the smelly hides he'd have to count to-morrow, the Saturday afternoon in his bit of a garden, and a joke to make Ethel smile a little.

“Here’s father, mother!”

As he had surmised, supper was almost ready and Arthur and the baby put to bed. Margaret, despite his wet clothes and sodden boots, came rushing toward him, precipitant with news she had kept locked in her heart all day. “Father,” she began, pressing his cold hand to her burning cheek, “I want to tell you somefin’.”

“In a moment. Be careful, darling. I’m wet through and through, you know.”

“Margaret! Let your pore father take off ‘is wet things, won’t you?”

“It’s a terrible night,” said Mr. Simmons, shiver-

ing still. "Where shall I leave 'em, Ethel? In the hall 'ere, or in the kitchen? My boots are soaked like brown paper. Hope there's a pair of socks warming."

"Freddy! Spread your father an old newspaper. Come through the kitchen, 'Erbert." She regarded him with anxious eyes. "Is it gone to your under-clothes?"

"I don't think so."

"That's a blessing. There's dry socks by the stove for you." Mr. Simmons crossed through, carefully stepping on the newspaper Freddy had laid for him, Margaret still holding on to his hand. "Now, Margaret, for goodness' sake leave your pore father alone for a minute. How's your chest, 'Erbert? I'll give it a rub with the ointment again afore you go to bed."

Margaret, obeying her mother, went up to the window, where she began to cry softly. Approaching her, Willie asked, "Did you tell him?" She gave two or three little sniffs and shook her head.

"Tell him what?" inquired Harry, overhearing.

"Nuffin'," said Willie.

"'Arry," called mother, "run into the bedroom an' get your father's other coat and wes'coat, there's a good lad. And be careful not to wake the baby, won't you?" She turned to her husband. "Will you be changin' your trousers, 'Erbert?"

"They're pretty wet."

"Well, try and 'urry, dear, 'cause dinner's been ready a long while. You ain't half late to-night."

"Such an awful storm!" he told her as he pulled off his boots. "Can you spare a little 'ot water, Ethel? I'd better just dip my feet."

"Get your father the little bath, Willie, an' a towel." Noticing Margaret wiping her eyes and nose on the window-curtains, she gently but firmly pulled her away. "Now, Margaret, stop your sillyin' an' be a good girl. Get out the knives and forks for me."

In the kitchen Harry and Fred were making themselves useful. Mr. Simmons was particularly careful of his aitches before Fred. The boy was at the top of his class and had just gained full marks in the school examinations. Already he had been talking about going to college—though where the necessary money was to come from Mr. Simmons had no idea. Very proud of Fred, but more at ease with his other sons. "How did school go to-day, Harry?"

"Picked for goal against the Radnor Street school to-morrow. But I—but I wish I—" He stopped and handed his father the dry socks. "Here, father dear."

"But what?"

"I ought to have a new pair of football knickers."

"What about the old ones?"

"They're all in rags, father. An' mother said that perhaps you—"

"But can't they be mended?"

"They look so patchy, father. The other boys'll 'ave decent ones."

Mr. Simmons was purposely silent; such a minor expense, but he couldn't afford it. He glanced up at Willie and diffidently asked him if last night's homework was all right.

"Rithmetic not bad; algebra all wrong."

"Umn—" He raised his eyebrows as much as to say: "Strange; very strange. After father had helped

you for an hour, and everything ! ” A confused jumble of *x*’s and *a* plus *b*’s mocked him. No, he couldn’t help him there ; couldn’t help him in anything. He pulled a gray sock on a red foot, timidly conscious that neither Willie nor Harry had as yet discovered what Fred, for some mysterious reason, kept to himself—their father’s ignorance.

“ I can’t never get it right,” said Willie, biting his finger-nails. “ Will you ‘elp me again to-night, father ? ”

“ We’ll see. But ‘ I can’t never get it right ’ isn’t quite correct, is it ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ It ain’t,” contradicted Harry.

Mr. Simmons appealed for knowledge. “ What say, Fred ? ”

“ Two negatives make an affirmative,” recited Fred.

“ Yes. That’s—that’s what I thought,” said his father miserably, passing the information on to Willie in a wise look.

“ ‘ Erbert, do ‘urry up, there’s a dear. The children is starving.’ ”

Stocking-footing it into his bedroom, Mr. Simmons hurriedly changed his trousers, emerged with them over his arm, put his wet clothes on the back of a chair near the stove, and entered the living-room in readiness for the evening meal. They were all seated round the table waiting for him. Mr. Simmons never felt quite comfortable before all these hungry little mouths he was rightfully expected to feed ; in their hungry glances he sometimes read, “ Why don’t you buy a little more meat and potatoes for us ? ” Many a time,

when mother's back was turned, would he slip an extra piece of mutton or a potato from his own on to Harry's or Fred's plate—growing, uncomplaining lads—and any little titbit that Ethel had lovingly placed before him was completely at the mercy of Margaret's fork. He gave two raps, and immediately all bowed their heads while he reverently, hopefully, pronounced a prayer.

"No, Willie, that piece is for father," said mother, as the nine-year-old requested a particular portion of Yorkshire pudding.

"Let 'im have it, Ethel."

"Don't encourage 'im, 'Erbert. I cooked that bit especially for you. There's plenty for all of us, see."

Four pairs of eager eyes watched the piling up of Mr. Simmons's plate, which naturally came first of all; the best potatoes, the nicest meat and two extra spoonfuls of gravy. Then came Harry's, then Fred's, then Willie's, and lastly Margaret's. Mrs. Simmons never got started until every one had been served; she always appeared indifferent about it anyway and preferred to pick the meat-bone and eat Willie's and Margaret's crusts instead of the nice brown potatoes. Long before that, however, respective plates were scraped and cleaned and every one was ready for the pudding. This evening it was rice-pudding, with raisins. Perhaps Mrs. Simmons would get some; perhaps she would not. Sometimes she scraped the pan in which it had been baked, although when it was very tasty one of the boys got that privilege in addition to his regular helping. "Ethel," complained Mr. Simmons. "I really can't

eat all this pudding. Let me put a bit on a plate for you?"'

"No, 'Erbert. I've got a little saved in the kitchen." Up to now, Mrs. Simmons, taking care of her brood, hadn't eaten anything. She rose with a warning: "Now don't give any of it to Margaret or Willie, will you? 'Cause you need it yourself, 'Erbert." Her desire that the breadwinner be properly fed was evidently not unanimous, for while she was in the kitchen two spoons coming from right and left attacked Mr. Simmons's pudding and considerably reduced its dimensions. Then came tea, plenty of bread and butter, and a little jam.

Dinner over, they left the table, and Mrs. Simmons sat down to eat her cold meat and potatoes alone, dipping the odd crusts into the thickening gravy. When it was fine the two eldest boys went out for an hour or so, but to-night they played dominoes instead. Mr. Simmons dropped into his rocking-chair, and Margaret brought him his evening newspaper.

"Arthur's been messing with it again," explained Mrs. Simmons from the table. "Is it badly torn, 'Erbert?"

The paper was in a deplorable condition. "It's not bad," he replied, straightening it out.

"Who d' you think I saw to-day, 'Erbert?"

"Who?"

"That there Mrs. Forester I used to work for up in Portman Square. I thought I recognized 'er, so I goes up an' says ' 'Ow-do-you-do' to 'er."

"Well, well!"

. MR. NOBODY .

" 'Why, Ethel,' she says, ' 'ow are you?' she says.

" 'I'm married now,' I says, 'these thirteen years.'

" 'Appy?' she says.

" 'Very 'appy,' I says; 'I got six children an' a good husband.'

" She seemed surprised like; kept looking me up and down, at my 'at and my fur stole all the time. 'Six children,' she says, sort of sneering at me. ' 'Ow amazing! I haven't got one.' " Mrs. Simmons was silent a moment. "Them sort never 'ave any, anyway."

Her husband rustled his paper.

"Yes; Mrs. Forester. She's got a bit fattish. But the clothes she wore! You should 'ave seen 'em. Wonderful." She sighed. "Some 'ave all, don't they?"

Mr. Simmons did not reply to that. Margaret had climbed on his lap and was snuggling her face close to his breast in an effort to hide fresh tears. The newspaper was dropped instantly. "Why, Margaret! Tears? Come now, tell father what it's all about." Willie stood by, noticeably involved in the proceedings. Mother was absorbed in her reflections, eating listlessly.

"It—it was on my way home from—s-school."

Willie said, "I was with 'er, father, and I didn't hear it drop or nuffin."

" Didn't hear what drop?"

A silence, save for choked little sobs. "I t-tied it up in my 'andkerchief and kept it in my dress pocket, and—and when I went to look for it my 'andkerchief an' all was gone." Her pent-up tears came now, in a deluge.

Then, suddenly, Mr. Simmons knew.

"We was going to buy sweets with it to-morrow afternoon," added Willie by way of explanation. "She was going to give me a 'a'penny of it; wasn't you, Margaret?" He looked up at his father. "She wouldn't tell mother she lost it."

Mrs. Simmons stopped in the act of cleaning her plate with a piece of bread. "What's the matter with 'er, 'Erbert? She's been crying ever since she came 'ome from school."

"She's lost her penny, mother," said Willie.

"What penny?" Was there an extra penny in her household that Mrs. Simmons knew nothing of?  
"What penny?"

It was an awkward question for Mr. Simmons to answer, but the cat was out of the bag now. "I gave 'er a penny last Wednesday," he confessed, slightly ashamed. As a matter of fact he had risen early that morning, and, it being a fine day, he walked all the way to Wapping Old Stairs. The penny saved had been secretly given to Margaret that night.

Mrs. Simmons, in a distressed tone of voice, said, "When I think of your pore feet, 'Erbert, it fair breaks my 'eart, it does."

"They're much better now, Ethel."

"Gawd knows you'd go naked for 'em and so would I. But there's a limit to everything. Besides, I bought Margaret some sweets last Saturday."

"She's only a little girl, and—" Margaret's grief touched him profoundly. He recalled her inarticulate joy when, last Wednesday, he surprised her with the penny, roguishly hinting that it be kept from mother; and now, while saving it for Saturday afternoon to

share with her brother, she had lost it. He pressed the sob-wracked body to him, kissed her curly head. Slowly, fearfully, impelled by an ungovernable impulse, his fingers crept to his waistcoat pocket and closed on the edge of one of his two remaining pennies. Looking up guiltily he saw his wife watching him with her soft brown eyes. Mr. Simmons grinned foolishly.

"Now, 'Erbert dear—don't you do it. Please."

"Of course not, Ethel; of course not." He pulled away his hand and began to dry Margaret's tears with her handkerchief. "Come, darling, be a brave little girl and don't cry any more. To-morrow we'll go and look for that bad penny; it's sure to be hiding somewhere, and we'll find it all right; you'll see." He had other schemes up his sleeve that he kept to himself. She was all in all the world to him, and during her late illness he suffered agonies; for he thought he loved her best of all, though he admired Harry's manliness and stood in open respect of Fred's learning.

Gradually the sobs cooled and subsided, the swollen eyes closed in sleep, and from her eyelashes he wiped the last pendent tear. Mother was removing the things from the table, taking them into the kitchen. The boys were busy with their games and lessons. Mr. Simmons couldn't control himself. Itching fingers once more fumbled in his waistcoat pocket, and this time they produced a penny; it was quickly wrapped in a little damp handkerchief, tied in a knot, and stuffed into a small dress pocket. A moment or so later, following an acquiescent nod from mother, he rose and carried his only daughter out of the room. After a while he softly returned, closed the bedroom door behind him,

sumed his rocking-chair, sighed, picked up his torn newspaper, and began to read of the wonderful happenings in the great outside world.

A loud knock upon the front door made him start. He watched his wife cross the room, heard her admit the visitor. A voice he knew, but couldn't exactly place, said, "Excuse me, missis, but does Mr. 'Erbert Simmons live here ?"

Mr. Simmons went to the hall to meet him and saw a big, red-faced, thick-set man with a blue-black mustache, finely waxed. He remembered him at once, despite his civilian clothes. "Hallo, 'Erb ! Last time I saw you was in the bloomin' trenches."

"Well, I'm hanged !" said Mr. Simmons, giving vent to his strongest expletive and beaming at his visitor. "I recognized your voice the minute you spoke at the door. Ethel, this is Sergeant-Major Prade. Well, I'm hanged ! I've spoken of you often and often, major. 'Aven't I, Ethel ?'

Mrs. Simmons first wiped her hand on her apron. "I thought you was a military man," she said with a bit of a smile.

"It's easy to tell 'em, missis." The sergeant-major inflated his broad chest. "Now then, 'Erb ! Straighten up a little for your missis and show her what's what. The good old Middlesex, eh !"

Mr. Simmons, continuing to beam, did straighten his back for a second. "Just take off your things, major. Like old times. Come in and sit down."

The soldier did so. "Aye, I can do with a bit of a rest, all right. Blim'me if I ain't searched the whole

of Lunnon for you. Straight, I have! One house to another—all over the shop—every place you ever lived at. And what a day!"

Mr. Simmons felt a duty incumbent upon him. "Will you take a drop of something, major? A little brandy?"

"Will I take a drop of brandy?" He winked at Mrs. Simmons. "I'll take every drop I can get."

Mrs. Simmons went to the sideboard and produced a three-quarter-empty bottle and two small glasses, her husband watching her. "Get one for yourself, Ethel."

"I don't feel like it, just now, 'Erbert."

Sergeant-Major Prade, his bowler-hat placed carefully under his chair, his hands resting, palm downward, on his knees, regarded Mr. Simmons with the old ferocious eye. "'Erb!" he commenced. "I've got a bit of news for you. I call it a lucky bit of news, and I only wish I was telling it to myself instead of to you. Ah!" Mrs. Simmons, bringing the drinks on a tray, set it down within easy reach on the table. "Well," said the sergeant-major, caressing his glass with thick fingers, "here's your 'ealth, missis—and yours, 'Erb. Good luck to the pair of you. And believe me, I'm bringing you a bit of luck too."

The Simmonses' hearts beat a shade quicker.

"You remember the old colonel, don't you? Colonel Talbot?"

"He's Sir Frederick Talbot now, isn't he?"

"He is. And a braver and better officer never went to France. Always generous. Why, I remember the time—but that's another story. Yes, he's now Sir Fred-

erick and a member of the House of Commons. Often comes up to the barracks, though; then it's drinks round for every one and a half a crown here and five shilling there. There ain't one of us as wouldn't go down on our marrow-bones and lick his boots—same as it used to be over in France. One of the best of 'em was he; and still is."

He paused to take another swallow of brandy. "That's as good a brandy as ever I tasted, missis," he said. Mrs. Simmons acknowledged the compliment in a wan smile, glancing at the diminished contents of a bottle which had done duty for almost a year. "Well," continued the soldier, wiping purple lips with the back of his hand, "up he trots yesterday, with a friend of his. A man you've heard of, I'll bet." He paused again, in order to give the name a dramatic pronunciation. "Sir William Horpen, the painter. Heard of him, ain't you?"

Mr. Simmons shook his head; his wife didn't commit herself. The sergeant-major, who in all probability had not heard of the great artist until yesterday, appeared astounded. "What! never 'eard of Horpen? Well, strike me pink!"

"I've heard of him," said a voice from the window-ledge. "I've seen some of his paintings in the Grafton Galleries."

"'Ush, Freddy dear!"

The boys had remained so quiet that Sergeant-Major Prade inspected his newly discovered audience with mingled surprise and perplexity. "What I've got to tell you, 'Erb," he said, scratching his head, "is a matter of extreme importance. See? Got to be kept

quiet. There's only three of us, not counting you and missis"—he looked at her—"got to tell her I s'pose—as knows anything about it. It's a secret!"

Somewhat puzzled and nervous, Mr. Simmons regarded his sons at a distance; then he looked up at the clock and noted the hour. "It's time for Willie to go to bed, in any case. Eh, mother! And, 'Arry!—supposing you and Fred play your game in the kitchen for a while. Me and Sergeant-Major Prade's got something to say."

They obeyed without a word. Mrs. Simmons also rose. "Would you like me to go, 'Erbert?"

"No, no, Ethel; you stay in 'ere." It was like an appeal for help. She sat down submissively, and respective doors closed softly on the departing boys.

"Good lads," commented the sergeant-major. He leaned nearer. "Got your old tunic, tin hat, gas-mask, 'Erb?" he asked in a half-whisper.

Mr. Simmons looked at his wife. "It's locked up in that there wooden chest, isn't it?"

"Good. You'll need 'em." Then he said: "The colonel—Sir Frederick, as is—wants to present to the House of Commons a painting of the Unknown Soldier, done by this here Sir William Horpen. Well, up they trots to the barracks yesterday and examines the photograph of the old battalion that was took on Armistice day over in Ypres. Sir William Horpen gets out a little microscope he has in his pocket and looks at every bloomin' face for—well, over an hour. At last he puts his finger on one face and says, 'That's the man I want!'" The non-commissioned officer flipped Mr.

Simmons on the knee with the back of his hand, then drew himself erect. "You, 'Erb!"

"Eh?"

"The colonel turns to me. 'Sergeant-Major,' he says, 'who's that man?' I thinks for a minute.

"'Private 'Erbert Simmons,' I tells him right away.

"'All right,' says the colonel; 'find where he is and report to me; quick march!'"

Sergeant-Major Prade closed his thumb about his glass and drained the contents. "Had no trace of your whereabouts, cocky! It took me a day to find you!"

"Yes, but—but—"

Mrs. Simmons's fingers were restless; she kept picking at a loose thread in her apron. "What do they want 'im for?" she asked faintly.

"What do they want him for?" boomed the sergeant-major. The question seemed stupid, as if she hadn't been listening. "What do you think? to be prime minister or something? Not this time, missis." He glared at them in a purple-faced condemnation of their ignorance. "They want him to pose for the picture, of course; to pose as the Unknown Soldier."

Husband and wife breathed easier. "Oh, is that all!" they said.

"All?" cannoned the soldier. "All? My Gawd! What more do you want? I wish I'd been picked for the honor, my lad, I can tell you. Think of your picture hanging in the House of Commons for ever and ever—long after all of us is pushing up the daisies. Why, you're a bloomin' hero if ever there was one. Don't that make you proud, missis?"

"It is wonderful," murmured Mrs. Simmons.

"Wonderful isn't the word for it. 'Just the man I want,' said Sir William. Why, it's marvelous; that's what it is." His heavy eyes responded to the feeling he had told his story well. "Now then, my lad, let's see you smile. Give me your hand, and say you're tickled to death."

But for some reason Mr. Simmons appeared reluctant. "You mean they—they want me to pose for 'em in my uniform?"

"That's hitting the nail right on the head, cocky."

"I've my work to look after, major. I've—I've the missis and six children to—depending on me. You see I've been with the River Horne Line Company over four years, and . . . I couldn't let nuffin' interfere with my work. Could I, Ethel?"

Sergeant-Major Prade swallowed whatever drops or half-drops of brandy were left in his glass as though it needed the addition of that stimulant to strengthen him in his criticism. "Look here, 'Erb!" he roared. "I can see you ain't appreciating this honor, or else you're as blind as a bat. Don't you see the glory of it? Don't you see what it means?"

It was a tremulous voice that answered: "I see what it means, all right. It means losing my job."

"Don't you do it, 'Erbert,'" came a tiny voice from Mrs. Simmons.

"What!" came the artillery. "Refuse an honor like this? An' me tramping all day in the rain like a lame duck to find 'im?" He laughed derisively in their faces. "Listen, my boy! Two of the greatest men in London wants you to represent the Unknown Soldier;

they've picked you out from among thousands." He pressed this importance home with a tense pointing finger. "You! 'Erbert Simmons! I'm telling you straight that's an honor that comes only once; an honor that only one in a million can have. One in a million! You ain't doing this for me, cocky. You ain't doing it for the old colonel. You ain't doing it even for the House of Commons." Frightening them, he sprang to his feet and stood rigidly at the attention. "You're doing it for your country—for England! That's what you're doing it for. England!"

Mr. Simmons, strangely agitated and thrilled, slowly got to his feet, and before his late drill-sergeant his arms automatically dropped to his sides.

"Now then, let's hear you say it! Go on. Say you can't do it now!"

Mr. Simmons couldn't say it. "If that's how it is—" he began.

"Can't you see it is? What'll the picture mean but England? What are you supposed to represent but England?"

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"I'll do it."

"Of course you'll do it." Sergeant-Major Prade sat down again, resenting the effort his theatricalism had cost him. "I'll mention about your work to the colonel; you'll be seeing him yourself, anyhow. They want you to start on Monday. It'll only take a month or so; a couple of hours in the mornings and afternoons like; I've the address in my pocket here. But I hope you understand you can't say nothing to 'em where you work—I'll explain that in a moment. Any-way, with the help of the colonel and Sir William,

getting a new job for yourself will be as easy as picking gooseberries off a tree."

"'Erbert!" pleaded Mrs. Simmons; "don't—don't—"

"Why not, missis? There'll be a hundred quid in it for 'im, besides the honor and glory."

"A hundred pounds!" repeated Mr. Simmons.

"Fifty, at least."

There was a silence. Mrs. Simmons's mouth worked funny; then, with a stifled cry, she hid her face in her apron.

"I—I—Fill up your glass, won't you, major?" invited Mr. Simmons.

"Ta." The nickel-plated clock on the mantelpiece ticked away with noisy regularity until the soldier spoke again. "Now, 'Erb, there's just one thing more. It's got to be kept quiet—under your bloomin' 'at. There's only five of us in the know." He enumerated them on his fingers. "The colonel, this 'ere Horpen, myself, you, and the missis. Not another soul, mind! That's why you can't explain matters to your boss, down at your job. Wouldn't do for 'em to know; you can see that, can't you? The whole of England and—well, if it comes to it, the whole world—must never catch on. Savvy?"

Mr. Simmons blinked.

"It's the Unknown Soldier, see? And that means little Mr. Nobody is going to pose for it. In other words, cocky, you'll be representing the greatest hero in a land all right, only no one's got to know it. See?"

“I see.”

“You’ve got to do more than see, my boy. Let’s ‘ave your word on it.”

“I promise.”

“And how about you, missis?”

Mrs. Simmons removed the apron from her face and looked up vacantly. Her husband explained, and she nodded.

“That’s the promise of the wife of a soldier, missis; and you know what that means, don’t you?”

Mrs. Simmons didn’t know, but she nodded again. Sergeant-Major Prade reached for his bowler-hat. “’Erb,” he said, “you remind me of the kid who cried for a plum, and in the end they had to cram it down his bloomin’ throat. Oh! ’ere’s the address!” He produced an envelop from his breast-pocket and laid it on the table. “Sir William marked it down hisself, see? That’s his own fist. Be there by ten o’clock Monday morning.” A glance at the clock brought a sharp whistle from his lips. “Blim’me, is it as late as all that? Midnight afore I gets ’ome. See if it’s still raining, ’Erb!” he asked, struggling into his mackintosh coat.

Mr. Simmons opened the front door. “Yes,” he said, visualizing his long walk in the morning. “’Ope it clears up by to-morrow.”

“So do I. Going to see Chelsea play Liverpool?”

“N-no.”

“I’m going if it rains cats and dogs. Best match of the season. Well, good night, missis. So-long, ’Erb.”

“Good night, major.”

Returning to the room, Mr. Simmons sank into his rocking-chair and sat very still. Mrs. Simmons put away the brandy, emptied what drops were left from one glass to another, handed it in silence to her husband, and went into the kitchen.

"What did he have to say, mother?" asked Fred, the moment she entered.

"Nuffin' much, dear. Just an old friend of your father's—that's all." She poured hot water into a large pan in which an assortment of cups, dishes, and table utensils were indiscriminately piled, and commenced on her nightly duties. "Don't worry your father to-night, will you?" she told them quietly. "'E's fair tired out."

Bending over her dishes she looked weary and old. "Mother," said Harry, suddenly affected by her sad eyes, "you go and sit down with father. Fred an' me'll do the dishes for you."

She smiled at him. "You don't do 'em clean, darling. No; you an' Freddy just trot off to bed. It's late, see?"

They kissed her good night and went in to their father in the next room. Mr. Simmons perked up a bit when he heard them coming, and he tendered his withered cheek for two good-night kisses.

Fred remained behind a moment. "If you go to the Grafton Galleries, father, could I go with you? I went with the teacher once, and there was a painting by Sir William Orpen—a battle-field—that made me feel awfully proud—of you, father. Teacher said he's one of the greatest painters in the world. He only paints great men, and they have to pay him a lot of money."

"Eh? What? Do they?"

"Oh, yes. He gets as much as a thousand pounds. More, I think."

"Well—we'll see. I've a few things I must do tomorrow. Well—we'll see. Good night, my lad."

"Good night, father dear."

In a little while Mr. Simmons joined his wife in the kitchen. "If I lost my job, Ethel, it would be terrible, wouldn't it?"

She didn't reply.

"But as the major says, Sir Frederick is bound to look after me, seeing as 'ow I'm doing this for 'im. An' a hundred pounds is a hundred pounds. Even fifty'd be a godsend. Wouldn't it? Freddy could 'ave his chance with all that, and—you could get that winter coat you liked in the shop, last month; you know, Ethel, that one with the fur on it. But keeping my job an' all seems too good to be true." Methodically he took off his coat and began to roll up his sleeves. "You know, Ethel, when 'e first started to speak—I thought I'd come into a bit of luck or something. Didn't you?"

"Now, 'Erbert, get to bed, there's a dear. I'll come an' rub your chest with the ointment in a minute. Then I got a bit of sewing to do on 'Arry's football trousers."

"What! an' let you do all them dishes alone! Not me!"

He seized a dish-cloth and took up his stand before a pile of unwashed plates. As he wiped them he drifted into a reverie. He saw a huge painting of himself hanging in a heavy gilt frame in the House of Commons and thousands of people in a long line coming to look

at it. A policeman in front of the picture kept moving them on. It was all very quiet, dignified, and awe-inspiring. He, Herbert Simmons, was also in the line. Yes, there he was, slowly looking about him and hoping that some one would recognize him, associate him with the famous painting, spread the news in excited whispers, and that the people would carry him on their shoulders as they would a national hero. But he remained totally unnoticed. Inch by inch he crept nearer the square of light illuminating the portrait, and at last he stood in front of it. The Unknown! Himself, to the life! "Move on, please," said the policeman. Just fancy! he wasn't allowed to stand an extra moment before his own painting. . . .

"What was it 'e called you?" asked Mrs. Simmons.

"Who?"

"That what's-'is-name. You know."

"Oh, the sergeant-major!" Mr. Simmons tried to smile, but his heart failed him. He moistened his dry lips. "Mr. Nobody," he said heavily.

She put her wet chapped arms about his neck and looked lovingly at him through red-rimmed, tearful eyes. "Don't you believe 'im," she sobbed brokenly; "don't you believe 'im. Why, there ain't—there ain't a man in the whole of London . . ."

And Mr. Simmons thought she was very beautiful.

## "DON'T GO TO ANY TROUBLE" \*

*Margaret Culkin Banning*

IN the top of the ice box was a round-shouldered piece of ice with a pint bottle of ginger ale leaning rakishly against it. Barbara closed the top door and opened the big door below. On one side were two tomatoes, half a head of lettuce, a triangle of cold steak, and some cold boiled beets. On the other she saw a quart of milk, half a pint of cream, some mayonnaise in a cereal bowl, a small piece of cheese and a saucer of lard—and so little butter!

She had thought that at least she could make sandwiches. But if she did make them for that mob in there, the children wouldn't have enough butter for breakfast.

The swinging door from the pantry opened and Alan appeared. He filled the doorway with his big healthy body, expansive with hospitality, the softening of a smile around his friendly eyes.

"Don't go to any trouble will you, dear? Just pick up anything. They all know it's informal. We didn't have any idea of stopping when we left the motion picture, but this is a lot nicer than a restaurant. Give them anything."

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"But there isn't anything!"

"Coffee?"

"You've got to have something with coffee, and if I make sandwiches there won't be enough butter for breakfast."

Alan appeared to think.

"Give them crackers then." Before she had time to demur he bent and kissed the top of her head.

"Just don't bother, dear. Anything will do." The swing door swished as he went back to the living-room.

Barbara pursed her lips without paying any attention. She got out a loaf of bread and cut it swiftly into clean thin slices, thinned the cream, and used some of it in the mayonnaise. The alarm clock on the shelf ticked busily in competition with Barbara for twenty minutes as she went from stove to ice box, from bread box to cake box. Two big glass trays standing on the kitchen table began to be comfortably filled. Coffee, tomato sandwiches (how far you could stretch two tomatoes, two Spanish onions and some mayonnaise!—it took hardly any butter), a tray of fruit cake eked out with cookies, sugar, cream, beautifully ironed napkins.

She carried the first tray into the living-room, and Alan jumped up to take it from her as the chorus went up.

"You shouldn't have gone to all that trouble, Barbara."

"This is a regular feast!"

"Why wouldn't you let me help?"

Barbara took their compliments and protests quietly. She may not have heard them, so absorbed was she

in getting just the right amount of cream in each cup. There wasn't any too much cream for eight people, even with her judicious thinning, and if the milkman was late in the morning, breakfast would be a desolate meal. But she was secretly proud of having been adequate to the situation.

The living-room was warm and bright. Barbara, looking up from her coffee pouring, saw how much they all were enjoying its comfort, the wood fire behind the twisted brass andirons, the chairs, each chosen for comfort and placed with grace, the low tables just within reach for ash trays or coffee cups. Her mind leaped ahead past the present comfort to the thought of its continuation and improvement.

The curtains really needed renewing. Six more months and they would be shabby. She regarded them speculatively while the others went on talking and laughing and eating. It was time, she thought vaguely, that people began to go home. Past midnight. She was glad to see someone get up at last and move toward the door.

Alan stood on the front porch waiting to see if anyone's car was frozen, listening to the starting of each chugging engine as the final act of watchful hospitality. His wife did not share his concern. Already she had begun to take the dishes out to the pantry, getting rid of the ugly débris, sodden cigarettes swimming in pale tan coffee. In the living-room she restored the chairs and cushions to their proper angles, and was again on her way to the kitchen sink when Alan came back.

"They had a great time," he said, glowing. "You're

not going to wash those things to-night, are you?"'

"I must. I'd rather wash them than see Sarah's cross face in the morning. Besides, I was using my best Spode, and I don't like to let it lie around with the breakfast dishes. Something might get broken."

"Then let me help."

"No—go to bed. You're tired, Alan, and you need to get up early. I'd rather do it alone. It's really quicker."

"Well, I wish you'd let me help," he said, departing.

The house grew very still down-stairs. Barbara washed each piece of china carefully and polished it with her fine linen cloths. Everything about Barbara was fine and well kept up, like her dish towels. She never allowed herself to get slovenly. There was never anything of hers that was not well taken care of, except perhaps the face that was reflected in her glass pantry doors. It had been a pretty face.

Barbara was one of the medium-brown, size-eighteen girls who make city streets in the United States so exciting, trim of wrist and neck and ankle, with plenty of soft brown hair, and a complexion which had enough color without ever being florid. A face which an hour of gaiety or a night of romance could make charming or even beautiful, and also a face which ten years of close concentration on clothes and curtains and house-keeping and children's manners could make strangely intent and yet strangely blank. Barbara was on her way to becoming a thin, middle-aged woman, one of those whose children speak of her with respect and affection, and whose virtues are summed up after her death in conventional phrases.

Everything was immaculate at last. Barbara's feet ached as she went up-stairs. Her cheeks burned and her eyes stung. Alan was already in bed. He looked at her commiseratingly, putting down the book he was reading.

"You shouldn't have gone to so much trouble, Barbara. You are worn out."

"I'm all right," said Barbara wearily. She got ready for bed. That didn't take long. But the children had to be inspected, their three little beds tucked in again, a hot-water bottle refilled for Jack's bed, because he had a slight cold, the windows let down from the top. There were so many little things. She went mechanically from one duty to another, enumerating them unconsciously as she did so.

"Poor tired Barbara," said her husband. "Call me if the children fret, won't you?"

He was asleep and breathing with comfortable heaviness when Jack coughed, with the harsh barking cough that indicated croup.

Barbara got up the first time to give him ipecac, the second time to make hot compresses, and the third time to light a steam kettle in his room. It was four o'clock before she went to sleep and seven when she wakened to listen to the children laughing and talking.

She called across the room to her husband, and he stirred in his cheerful, sleepy fashion, asking her if she had had a good rest.

"Jack had croup."

"He sounds all right now," said Alan. "I'm afraid that you just fussed over him."

He didn't say it unkindly, but with sympathy.

Barbara did not answer. Her head was light with fatigue, but already she had started to put her day in order. As she had feared, the milkman was late. There was only a little milk for the children's cereal and for them to drink. Barbara gave what cream there was to Alan, and drank her coffee clear, though she didn't like it that way.

"We used nearly all the cream last night and the milkman isn't here yet, children. You'll have to be content with what you have," she told Madeline, who wanted another glass of milk.

"Don't bother, Barbara," said Alan, "this is just fine."

Barbara's eyes held a little satire as she looked at her husband. Of course it was fine for him. He had the cream. And he had the cream, she reminded herself, because she had carefully put away enough for his coffee.

There were times, she thought to herself, when Alan seemed exasperating. However, one couldn't say that, in the face of his good temper and kindness and ready sympathy.

Barbara was a little ashamed of herself, but she felt that her husband was getting on her nerves. She devoted herself to stoking the children with cereal and toast, and went to the hall to say good-by to them as they dashed for school. When she came back to cold black coffee and buttered toast, her interest in breakfast had altogether gone.

Alan came around the table and kissed her.

"You're not to work too hard to-day," he told her.

"I don't want to find you all tired out to-night. Don't do a thing. Just rest all day."

"It's ironing day, and Sarah will have to iron," she answered shortly.

"Well, let things go then—"

Barbara's mouth shut with a little snap; but Alan did not notice.

"I wonder, dear, when you get around to it, would you ask Sarah, when she's ironing, to press those ties of mine."

"I'll press them."

"No; have Sarah do it."

"They'll be done," she amended her promise.

"Don't bother about them, will you?" But Barbara knew that when he came home the ties would be lying in renewed freshness on his bureau, and that he knew it, and secretly would expect it, even while he disclaimed the intention to cause anyone work. He still had not left the room. There was something on his mind.

"Yesterday I had a letter from my brother John."

"Yes. How is he?"

"He's fine. He said that his wife was coming on from the West next week and could stop a few days here. She's sailing for Europe again."

"Next week?"

"He says that he doesn't want us to go to a bit of trouble. Just that she'd like to stop off and see the city, and that she wants to get acquainted, and be treated like one of us. She thinks it's time the families got together. Nice way to put it, wasn't it?"

Barbara broke out.

"It's a stupid way to put it. She can't be an imbecile, and she knows that any guest, particularly one that you've never seen, can't be treated like a member of the family. It means all kinds of extra things: extra food, extra service—and after that luncheon I gave last week I practically promised Sarah not to entertain any more this month."

"Oh, well, we needn't entertain her. And of course if you don't want her to come, I can simply wire John that it isn't convenient to have her."

"Nonsense. You can't refuse to receive your only sister-in-law."

"Well, if I let her come, you mustn't allow her to bother you. You mustn't go to one bit of extra work."

He smiled, obviously glad to have the matter pleasantly settled on that basis.

"I think you'll like her a lot, Barbara. I met her once. She's supposed to be something of a beauty, you know. John's come on tremendously since he married her, three years ago. He's making lots of money."

"I suppose they have everything," suggested Barbara.

"They live pretty well, I guess."

"Well, we'll try to make your sister-in-law—Janice, isn't it?—we'll try to make her comfortable."

"She couldn't help being comfortable here," answered Alan, and breezed out, whistling. For a few minutes Barbara did not rise. Already she had begun to plan in spite of herself. The guest-room curtains and bedspread must go in the wash to-morrow to make the room perfectly fresh and insure its best appearance. She would have to get her lunch cloths and nap-

kins all laundered, for people would no doubt be coming in and out all week, even if she did no formal entertaining.

Sarah came in to take out the dishes, and Barbara regarded her worriedly. Sarah would have to be told.

"Sarah, next week, Mrs. John Thomson, my husband's brother's wife, will be spending a few days with us." Sarah's face became sour. "She is a charming lady and I want her to have a good time while she's here. She'll just be like one of the family. You needn't go to any trouble or extra work. I'll look after her room myself, and manage to help you with the cooking while she's here."

"I thought we weren't going to have any more company this month," said Sarah.

It was on the tip of Barbara's tongue to say, "So did I," but she did not.

"This need not disturb your routine at all, Sarah," she said. "I'll look after everything."

But Sarah's face was unconvinced. She went out aggressive and dish-laden, and Barbara rose and went into action.

Janice Thomson entered the house laughing. Alan was carrying her perfect luggage, and she already had a small niece by each hand. They looked up at her wonderingly. There was something luxurious about Janice which touched a new note of response in their small souls. She had a picture-book look, with her short waved hair and the soft small hat that so perfectly matched her fur coat. The coat was of mole and squirrel, which set off her charming skin and her dark, lazy eyes.

There was no trace of embarrassment about her. She dropped her coat on the nearest sofa and sat down before the fire which was blazing in her honor.

"What a lovely room, Alan. You have a clever wife." She smiled at Barbara, who smiled back for lack of something better to say or do and felt both attracted to her guest and annoyed by her. The children did not mix their emotions. Mrs. Thomson had brought presents. She opened a dressing bag, and the hearth was soon littered with tissue paper and ribbons. They worried Barbara, who wanted to clear up. Also, it was on her mind to ask her husband if he didn't have to get back to his work. But Alan sat around blandly, obviously admiring this charmingly pretty sister-in-law, and beginning to suggest ways to entertain her.

"We ought to ask the Grangers in to-night, Barbara. Janice used to know Mary Granger. Let's ask the Grangers and the Willoughbys, and a few others."

"Heavens, no!" protested Janice, "I'll see Mary later. Why have a party?"

"It won't be any trouble," said Alan. "Will it, Barbara?"

"No, indeed," agreed Barbara, reflecting that it was one of the nights that Sarah went out early. "No trouble at all for Alan," she said under her breath.

"Come up and let me show you your room, Janice," she suggested. "Alan, don't you think they will be waiting for you at the office?"

Janice rose comfortably, looking from her host to her hostess. She left her hat on the table and her purse

on the mantel as she trailed along after Barbara. Alan had no excuse to linger. He went back to his work.

The hat and the purse were, as Barbara guessed after half an hour, indicia of the way Janice did things. Or, rather, of the way she didn't do things. She entered the immaculate guest-room, where the chiffonier drawers were tightly shut and the dressing table spotless, and left a trail of things wherever she turned. It was not exactly slovenliness. She simply did things in the easiest way.

It seemed not to occur to her that a room should always be faultlessly restored after its use, that traces of occupancy should be erased, that magazines should be replaced, and hats kept on shelves. And though it was Sarah's night out, and Barbara had been forced to hint that it was, Janice sat at the table, lingering over her coffee, regaling Alan, and trying to regale Barbara, with a host of amusing stories picked up here and there.

They had barely left the table when the guests for the evening began to drift in. Barbara was disturbed. She went to the kitchen to try to mollify Sarah, and found that august person singing over her work. It seemed like a dream, until Barbara noted two of Janice's frocks lying over the ironing board and on the window ledge above the dishpan a five-dollar bill.

"That's the way she gets away with it," thought Barbara bitterly, even while she drew a long breath of relief over Sarah's susceptibility to bribery: "but what if you haven't any five-dollar bills to give away!"

However, it was clear that Sarah was a convert to

the guest. That was a comfort. The children were converts too, and when Barbara went to tuck them in she heard nothing but talk of Aunt Janice.

"Isn't she beautiful, Mother?" asked Betty romantically, and Barbara had a sudden feeling of intense irritation with her daughter, as well as a desire to explain moral values and economic differences to her.

Barbara went down-stairs, pausing on the landing for a glimpse of the group in the living-room. They were enjoying themselves. It was the first time that the Grangers had ever been in her house, and on Alan's account she was glad to see them there, though vaguely she resented the fact that Janice had been the occasion of their coming. Granger was a capitalist whose interest might be very useful to a young fellow in the bond business.

Janice was very pretty, Barbara admitted. It wasn't a flapper prettiness, either. She wasn't too thin for a woman of thirty-two or thirty-three, nor too pert. She looked well cared for—that was it—rested—well dressed, and as if she had dozens of other gowns to be beautiful in. She was easy in every gesture, and confident, without aggression.

They were all discussing plans for the entertainment of Janice. The Grangers were insisting on a small dinner for the next night, and Mrs. Willoughby wanted to have her chance to pay tribute to the interesting guest. Not to be outdone Barbara said she was having a luncheon, and began to plan it furiously in the back of her mind.

Janice was cordial.

"I never was in such a hospitable place. I meant to stay only long enough to see what my adorable small nieces looked like, but everyone is so decent to me—"

"Oh, you must stay a week, anyway," said Alan. "I don't find a beautiful sister every day."

"Barbara would be awfully tired of me, I'm afraid. Guests that pop in on you self-announced can be an awful nuisance."

"Nonsense," said Alan; "Barbara's crazy to have you."

"Well," agreed Janice, "maybe I'll stretch it out a bit. I don't sail until the twentieth. But you must please promise not to go to any trouble for me."

They didn't go out that first night. They played bridge—two tables, with the Grangers and Willoughbys—and Barbara served delicious refreshments. She tried to act as if she were enjoying the party, especially as she met Janice's cool, slow eyes resting on her once or twice. But when the Grangers and Willoughbys had gone and Janice was in bed, Barbara did speak to Alan.

"This is going to be an expensive visit," she said.

"Don't bother about it, dear. Isn't Janice a wonder? Don't you like her?"

"Don't bother about it—how can I help it? You know how I plan and budget so that we can get by and save a little. Suppose I didn't? Suppose I were like Janice, and spent a couple of hundred dollars on a dress? Do you know that dress she had on cost two hundred dollars? Do you know my dress was made at home and cost sixteen?"

"Come, darling, you're tired. Now jump into bed and let me look after the children."

But Barbara could not. She went her rounds with her heart aching as well as her feet.

That was the first night. There followed a group of extremely busy days. Mary Granger entertained at dinner for Janice, and Barbara furbished up her best evening gown and went, to spend an evening watching Janice receiving the homage of a dozen men and that of at least half of their wives. Alan, as brother-in-law and escort, enjoyed himself hugely. Mrs. Willoughby gave a tea in her lovely home, and Barbara met women rather intimately whom she had known only slightly before.

Barbara's luncheon cost twice what her luncheons usually did, and it was a great success, according to the guests. But Barbara tasted nothing; from sheer fatigue she had lost all sense of hunger. Since five o'clock that morning she had been up making molded salads and preparing sweetbreads, and doing all the things that Sarah would not have time or skill to do.

At intervals her husband told her not to go to any trouble about the luncheon, just to give the guests what was easy. Having made those general recommendations in his most sympathetic manner, he seemed to devote himself to Janice. Janice had left the book she wanted up-stairs, and he went up to get it. Or Janice wanted half a dozen telegraph blanks, and he went down-town after them.

Janice did offer to help, but she made Barbara so nervous that she quickly gave it up. Barbara definitely

did not like to have Janice around the pantry or linen cupboard. She insisted that there was nothing she could not do more quickly and more easily if unassisted, and Janice would go off with the children, disorganizing their routine, and bringing them back gay and adoring and laughing.

It was on the evening of the sixth day—Janice had agreed to stay seven—that a crowd gathered again at the Thomson house. They had been to a theatre party and Alan had brought them all home for a drink of ginger ale. Barbara, stirred to final effort, had made a lobster Newburg, cheese toast, and coffee, and served a generous buffet supper. It was long after midnight when the guests went. Barbara listened to their last jests, their promises and compliments, with a complete sense of unreality.

All that was real to her now was the waiting kitchen, the table covered with dishes which she had not stopped to wash. She knew that the kitchen must be clean, so that in the morning Sarah would be able to get a good breakfast, with all the extra trimmings with which they had served breakfast since Janice came. And she knew that afterward, sometime to-morrow morning, she must sit down and figure up what all this had cost, and how to pare it off from some other expected and calculated expense. The dishes first—the dishes first—and then to pound up those pillows—

“Yes, indeed,” she was saying to Mrs. Granger, “it’s been wonderful to have Janice here. . . . Yes, I do hope I shall see more of you. It’s been very nice to get acquainted. . . . Yes, Alan is always lots of

fun." The last statement was in response to various complimentary things Mrs. Granger was saying about Alan.

He was standing on the hearth rug, telling Granger a story. Comfortable and healthy and happy, Barbara reflected that he had thoroughly enjoyed this week.

How bitterly tired she was!

Janice, radiant in a soft brick-colored chiffon dress, came over and slipped an arm through Barbara's, and stood that way as they said good night together. She drew Barbara to the door, and they watched the motors go down the street.

"Great party," said Alan. "Tired, girls?"

"Barbara is," said Janice.

Barbara turned accustomedly to the dishes on the card tables.

"Don't wash these to-night," said Alan.

"You know what Sarah is," sighed Barbara.

"Well, let me do it," Alan suggested affably, as usual, with the familiar gesture of responsibility.

"I can do it more quickly myself—"

"Don't go to any trouble—" began Alan.

"She won't," said Janice. "She's going to sit right down here in front of the fire. Take the dishes out and wash up, Alan. I'll straighten this room."

Barbara sat down, protesting, and with a few amazingly swift gestures Janice made the room presentable. Then she lowered the lights and sat down by Barbara.

"I'd better go and do those dishes," said Barbara.

"No, let Alan do it."

"But he doesn't know how, Janice. He never—"

"Oh, let him begin. It's my last night. Let's relax,"

answered Janice lazily. She stretched her body out comfortably, feet crossed on the hearth, and the position was somehow contagious. Barbara found her muscles less tense. Off in the pantry Alan was doing something very remote.

She made a last struggle.

"I ought to go help him, at least."

"Why? He's big and husky. Can't he wash a few dishes? Let him learn. Most men are more competent than you think. But they never show it if you keep doing things for them."

Barbara looked curiously at her guest. A crash of dishes came from the pantry. Barbara jumped up.

"Don't bother," said Janice.

"Didn't you hear?"

"Dish broke, didn't it?"

"I was using my Spode," explained Barbara, almost with a wail.

"Better have cracks in your dishes than wrinkles in your face," said Janice clearly.

Barbara's hand went to her face. Wrinkles?

"They aren't there yet, but they will be. Sit down and be easy. Let him smash a few, and pay for them."

"Have you any idea of what it means to pay for them?"

"I've a perfect idea. I married his brother, didn't I? They're as alike as two peas. Only, I'm managing to stay in love with my husband, Barbara."

"I don't see quite what you mean." Barbara's tone was icy.

"Come," said Janice, "I despise talking about such things. But we're the only two women in the world

in exactly the same boat. We married the same temperament. You are making Alan lazy and selfish, don't you see? You're letting him make his empty gesture, and escape. How many times a day does he tell you not to go to any trouble, because he knows he can trust you to go to enough trouble to make him comfortable? It isn't conscious, I know. It's your own fault. You are one of the women, Barbara, who lets the world make a hack of them."

"I really don't quite get the point of this little lecture," began Barbara, but stopped, because her sister-in-law had turned to her again, her eyes frank and honest and filled with affection.

"You do. You know it's because I'm ridiculously fond of you, Barbara. No one could live in the house a day without seeing what a darling you are, and how you carry the heavy end—so selfishly carry the heavy end that you aren't getting the most out of Alan. He's a strong, intelligent man. Why don't you get some work out of him?"

"It's deeper than you think, Janice. It's not dishes particularly. It's all right to be fine and languid and beautiful as you are, when you're rich. But when you have to scrape for money—we do, you must have seen it."

"So would I, Barbara, if I'd tried your method. I didn't. I saw the tendency to shift responsibility, to dispose of things by a gesture. So I sat still and looked useless. Someone had to do the work, and so John did. If I'd—"

"But that's not being a wife—"

"I'm not so sure that being a wife isn't making

your husband make the most of himself!" said Janice.

They heard Alan's voice calling:

"Come on, girls, and see how a man does it. Here's the cleanest kitchen you ever saw. I smashed one dish, darling; but I'll get you another."

He was absurdly proud of the way he had cleaned up. The dishes were washed and dry, all in the wrong places, and the food had been hurled into the garbage can or ice box. But Barbara was amazed to see how competent Alan had been.

"Put her to bed, Alan," said Janice mischievously, "and don't let her tuck up a single child to-night. She's completely tired out."

Barbara meant to lie awake, thinking, but she fell asleep listening to Alan stir about the room. It was strange and rather fun to be in bed first.

When Janice departed the next day, she gave each of the girls a pretty new dress, Jack a set of electric trains, Alan a kiss, and Barbara a kiss and a word in her ear: "Remember, the Thomson men are capable, but you have to put it up to them!"

Barbara actually found tears in her eyes as the train pulled out. No one since her marriage had taken so much interest in her. Of course it was a mad point of view. Still—

When they were alone that night after dinner, Barbara, who had been thinking instead of mending, said suddenly:

"Janice's visit cost me over a hundred and fifty dollars, with the extra clothes we had to get and food and all. I don't know where it's coming from. But you will get it for me, won't you, dear?"

"Don't bother about that," began Alan.

"I'm not going to," said Barbara.

As she went past him, she smiled sweetly and went to bed. Alan looked after her. A hundred and fifty dollars deficit was serious. She didn't seem to realize that hundreds of dollars didn't grow on trees. It wasn't like her at all. But then, all women were irresponsible at bottom. One had to look after them. Janice, Barbara, all alike. One hundred and fifty—he got out a pencil and began to figure. That new issue of Whitehead and Heath's bonds ought to be carefully promoted.

Everywhere she went, Barbara was reminded of Janice. The children spoke of her. Her friends spoke of her. Barbara caught herself talking about her more than once, remembering little mannerisms, habits of thought and speech. She set herself deliberately to find what the children had liked in Janice, what Alan had liked and, though they could never tell exactly, she analyzed it for herself. The fruits of her analysis were the purchase of two new dresses and a visit to a masseuse, who told her she ought to lie down an hour a day, or she would soon be an old woman.

It surprised her again that Alan was so proud of the dresses. He didn't seem to mind in the least that she had paid so much for them.

Barbara lay down for an hour every day. She placated Sarah with a ten-dollar-a-month raise, and told Alan she needed more money, though as she made the outlandish request she felt ashamed.

Alan found himself making love to her instead of talking business. When he did mention business she

found, to her amazement, that he had placed an enormous issue of bonds with Mr. Granger, and that he was the temporary hero of the local bonding business. The commission from that and a few subsidiary sales almost doubled the Thomson income.

Barbara admitted to herself that Janice was right. If Alan hadn't had to have that first hundred and fifty dollars, if she had managed to cut that expense and spread it over the income for months, and arranged it for him, he wouldn't have taken his plunge into aggressive new business. This meant all kinds of things.

But her own part of the game was not growing into second nature. The lovely indolence of Barbara sat upon her prettily but not comfortably. With more money and the promise of still more money, her old skirmishes with bills seemed to be over. There was a little second maid to help Sarah now, a competent, deft girl who cleared up after evening parties. When they said, "Don't go to any trouble," Barbara took them at their word, and didn't. But secretly she missed trouble.

Then one night she heard Alan down-stairs. She had gone up to bed early, for they were not going out and it was part of her regimen to rest and keep young. But this night she did not sleep, and she could hear Alan pacing and pacing up and down, restlessly, indecisively.

She listened for an hour, then broke her rule and, slipping on a kimono, went down-stairs. As she rounded the bend in the stairs she could see him. It

seemed to her that his old plump blandness was quite gone. He was hard-looking, a little tired, competent, and reserved.

"What's the trouble, Alan?" she said.

"Why, nothing. Aren't you asleep?"

"Can't you see I'm not? I'm listening to you. What is the trouble?"

"Why, I'm a little bothered," he told her reluctantly. "Some news from my brother John. He's had a little bad luck. I was trying to figure—but you needn't bother your head over it—"

"What?" She sat down, and Alan came over beside her.

"You see, he's lost a lot of money and he needs a leg up. He doesn't want to tell his wife about it unless he has to. You know how Janice is—awfully nice, but utterly helpless. I'd like to help them out, but I don't see my way to do it without cramping ourselves just now. I've made quite a lot lately, and of course John will get on his feet again. But I hate to ask you—"

"Ask me anything," said Barbara; "we owe Janice a good turn. She did something for me. I'd do a lot for Janice."

"Do you suppose you could figure out a way to cut our expenses? So I could lend John something to tide him over—"

"I know I could," Barbara promised.

Alan didn't caress her. He admired her.

"I hate to have you go to all that trouble, dear—"

"I'm lonesome for trouble!" answered Barbara.

## THE PARADISE POACHER \*

*William Harper Dean*

“A-A-A-A-RON, A-a-a-a-ron! Big a, little a, r-o-n! A-a-a-a-ron!”

Far up the street a boy’s voice rose in taunting cry. Then, as though frightened at his own audacity and having taken to his heels, there was absolute silence over Park Road this midsummer morning. But every boy within sound of that voice felt the electric thrill of terror which the name of Aaron inspired. Randolph and Albert, seated on the edge of the boulevard which skirted the boundary line of Rock Creek Park’s virgin woodland, sprang to their feet and cast anxious glances about them. They were clad in short-sleeved khaki shirts, and over the shoulders of each were slung haversack and canteen.

“Here he comes!” whispered Albert.

Like rabbits the two scurried to cover in the woods. Albert flattened himself behind an enormous oak, while Randolph dropped to his stomach beside a moss-blushed log. Then, with hearts beating in flutters, they waited.

Presently sounded the chuck-chuck-a-luck of hubs playing loosely on axles and in another minute the boys

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were staring from ambush at the two-wheeled, canvas-hooded cart drawn by a fat gray horse. The driver sat humped on the seat, a powerful man in corduroys and blue-flannel shirt. His face was covered with reddish-brown beard; the small eyes under the shaggy red brows shifted restlessly as though searching the roadside for his tormenter.

Now he passed and the horse's hoofs beat loudly on the bridge spanning a wooded gorge at the park entrance. The two boys exchanged sheepish glances.

"Now," said Randolph, clearing his throat as he brushed the dirt from his clothes, "who you reckon hollered at him? If we hadn't been watchin' he mighta taken it out on us." The two returned to the roadside and sat down again.

"What you reckon he'd do if he did ketch us, Ranny?"

"That's tellin'. What do kidnapers generally do with kids they ketch?"

Albert grew thoughtful. "Maybe he ain't a kidnaper; he'd been 'rested before this, if he was."

"You think so? Huh, he's too slick for that. If he wasn't so slick, how could he be a grave-robber?"

"Who th' dickens says he's a grave-robber?"

"Kirk does—that's who," returned Randolph. "He knows a man that's a medical student that says, if it wasn't for Aaron an' cross-eyed Chris Baker, they never would get anybody to operate on. You know what they do?—put pieces of tires on th' horses' feet an' th' wagon wheels, so people can't hear 'em at night when they go to th' graveyards."

Albert swallowed nervously and was about to offer

comment on this astounding revelation, when they both clapped eyes on an automobile rolling down the boulevard for the park entrance. Both boys ran into the road and waved it down. "Mister," they chanted, "give us a lift?"

"Where are you going?" asked the man, stopping.

"Through th' park out to th' country," answered Randolph. He caught sight of a bag filled with golf clubs on the rear seat. "You're goin' to th' Chevy Chase links, ain't you? That's jes' where we wanter go; we'll walk from there."

"Hop in," said the driver.

The boys swarmed over the sides.

"Gee," chuckled Randolph, as they went through the park, "we're some kinda lucky, all right! Last time—remember? About forty cars passed us without stoppin'."

Throughout that drive Albert sat very quiet. He couldn't turn his thoughts from that great hulk of a man with the red beard. Aaron was common property to the boys of Park Road, for the biography of every hundred-per-cent boy must devote at least one chapter to his ogre; without such a possession, boyhood would be sadly lacking in leaven. But this morning, for some reason, the sight of Aaron had filled Albert with a new dread. He couldn't shake it off. He replied only in monosyllables to Randolph's rapid-fire monologue.

Not until they had left the car as it turned into the club grounds and after they had walked a good mile over a badly worn dirt road that twisted through a field of broom sedge and stunted pines did Albert succeed in putting Aaron out of his mind. And when

finally the two boys had fought their way through a woods wellnigh impenetrable, because of its riot of sapling-and-brier undergrowth, and come upon a little clearing, Albert was humming contentedly. In the very center of this clearing stood a tiny hut with sides of pine branches and roof of thatch.

"Hot dawg!" Randolph slung canteen and haversack from his shoulders and entered the hut. "Everything's all right," he called from within. "How 'bout th' arsenal, Albert? You see about that while I'm fixin' th' fire."

Albert had relieved his shoulders of their burden. Now he stole into the thicket to the base of an enormous oak. He knelt and raised a large flat stone, revealing a wooden box half filled with a boy's assortment of precious plunder. He examined the lard-smeared steel trap and unwrapped the oilcloth from two bows and a bundle of arrows to satisfy himself they were not warped. Then he reverently handled the great old horse pistol which Randolph's uncle had given the boy from his collection of Civil War relics.

Albert replaced the treasures, put back the stone and scattered pine tags over it. "Ain't anybody been here," he reported back to Randolph, who was down on his knees blowing at the lighted kindling. "Man, I betcher we ketch all kinda game out here this fall."

Randolph coughed with smoke and rubbed his streaming eyes. "Yeah, we'll make a coupla pitfalls with a sharp stake in the center too. Anybody that comes monkeyin' roun' this camp's gonna wish he didn't, I'm sayin'."

Albert was unpacking his haversack, kneeling with his back to Randolph. "But s'pose somebody fell in one; they'd have us 'rested, wouldn't they?"

"What right have they got here?"

"We don't own this land, Ranny."

"We own th' camp, don't we? Anyhow, we c'n make signs an' put up: 'Beware of the Traps.' Anybody that walks in one then does it at their own risk, don't they?"

Albert had no answer for this. Randolph shoved a forked stick into the ground on either side of the fire, laid a sapling crosspiece between the two prongs, poured water from his canteen into a small lard pail and hung this over the fire.

"How many eggs we gonna cook?" he asked, turning to Albert. "We don't wanter run short o' provisions; there's always danger o' gettin' stormbound in a camp."

"Jes' two," nodded Albert, passing the eggs over his shoulder from the pile of provisions he was sorting on the ground. "We got plenty o' other stuff. Boil 'em hard, Ranny."

Randolph dropped the eggs into the little maelstrom of boiling water and stood watching them as they tossed about.

The next moment was for many weeks to furnish nightmare material for Albert. He heard a sudden commotion behind him and wheeled to see Randolph dash madly over the fire, wrecking the improvised crane and scattering embers and sparks. As Randolph reached the thicket, he let loose a terrified yell. Albert

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dropped a jar of peanut butter and sprang to his feet. For one frightful moment he gazed at Randolph's retreating figure.

Then, himself pursued by a nameless horror, he tore after the boy. "Ranny, Ranny!" he cried. "Whatsa matter? Whatsa matter?"

But Randolph was plunging through briars with the sound of a horse that has wandered into a nest of yellow jackets. Randolph yelled again; this time it was a gurgling scream that brought Albert to a sudden stop and all but froze the blood in his veins. For he saw Randolph struggling wildly in the clutch of a powerful, red-bearded figure, which seemed to have risen from the earth to block the boy's path.

Albert's own cry was feeble enough. "Aaron!" he gurgled.

On wabbling knees he turned and fought frantically at the briars, which seemed to reach out living tendrils to hold him for Aaron. His clothing was torn, his face and hands bleeding when, after an eternity, he reeled into the field of broom sedge and pine. Then he ran as he had never run before. The wind whistled past his ears.

In the midst of a tremendously busy session with his morning mail Mr. Meredith answered the ring of his desk phone, to hear his wife's voice break tremulously:

"Randolph, some—something's happened to Ranny."

The father smiled. "How unusual," he answered. "What is it this time, Betty?"

But there was no escaping the ominous import of

her summons: "You must come home right away; it's —oh, it's terrible!"

Mr. Meredith's face sobered instantly. He seized his hat, caught a descending lift and in a pair of minutes was on his way home. On that trip his reputation as a conservative driver was sacrificed on the altar of paternal anxiety. He ran up the terrace steps, past the group of silent, staring boys gathered in front of his home, and into the living room.

His wife sat with her hands clenched in her lap. She was gray to the lips. In the center of the room stood Albert Carr, pale to the lobes of his protruding ears.

"Well, what's happened?" said the father, looking about for Randolph.

"Tell Mr. Meredith, Albert," said the mother weakly. "Tell him."

Albert swallowed three separate and distinct times before he could articulate. "Aaron's caught Ranny."

"Aaron?" repeated the bewildered man. "Who's that?"

"Th' kidnapер, th' grave-robber."

"A fearful creature, a half-wit," said the mother huskily.

Instantly the father's jaw set and his eyes narrowed. The quickest way to awaken primitive passions in a human being is to threaten something of his own flesh and blood. The father's eyes took on a gleam that threw new terror into Albert's harassed soul.

He had expected to see Mr. Meredith rave or reel under the blow. To the boy there was something terrific in the man's tense, measured step to the hall phone,

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something awful in the calmness of the voice which called police headquarters and asked for an officer, concluding with "My son has been kidnaped."

The father came back to the mother. "Don't worry," he said, resting a hand on her shoulder. "We'll have him back in a jiffy. I'll attend to this."

He went out to the front walk, Albert dogging his heels. Down the boulevard came a patrolman on a motorcycle. Mr. Meredith signaled the man to a stop.

"Were you sent here from headquarters?"

The patrolman shook his head. "I'm one of the park patrol."

"My son has disappeared, caught by a half-witted creature called Aaron. You'll go with us, won't you?"

"Have you a warrant?"

"Oh, I'll attend to that later!"

"Well, it's a bit irregular, but I guess I'd better go. Where did it happen?"

Mr. Meredith turned to Albert. "Where was it, Albert?"

"Out in our camp," said the miserable boy. "I heard Ranny holler. He started runnin', an' I ran after him. All at once ol' Aaron jumped up in the woods an' caught Ranny. I heard him holler again. I ran every speck o' th' way back."

Mr. Meredith nodded. "Get in my car, Albert." He turned to the patrolman. "All right," he said.

Directed by Albert, the car, followed by the motorcycle, sped through the park. Mr. Meredith sat very straight at the wheel and his face was drawn. Albert glanced at him timidly, then looked away. He believed he would see murder this day.

The father's mind was working rapidly. His thoughts revolved about one great pivotal point—the calm, unshakable resolve that, half-witted or whole, the creature who had dared lay violent hands on his son should drink to the last bitter dregs full measure of retribution.

Yet somehow there were other thoughts, vivid recollections of a scene enacted this very morning, which came back now with fearful intensity. He saw again his son's face when, as that morning at breakfast the boy had concluded his account of the secret camp, he had asked his father if he wouldn't go out with them to it to-day.

"Who would look after my business, Ranny?" the man had asked.

"Then, Saturday," Randolph had pleaded. "You always close th' office half th' day then."

"But that's the only time I have for golf."

Randolph had looked down. "I'd give anything if you would, daddy. We could have lots o' fun together."

Together! That was the keynote of this growing remorse. They could have lots of fun—together. The boy couldn't understand, the father remembered he had thought at the time. But now he was thinking differently. If he had gone out with him it would have gladdened that boy's heart, and this ugly, cold fear would not be gripping at his heart nor would these thoughts of vengeance be making the blood pound hotly through his temples.

"Nex' turn to th' left," cried Albert, pointing ahead.

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The car took the turn and bounced over the rutted road to the very edge of the thick woods.

Albert leaped out.

"C'mon!" he cried. "I'll show you."

Father and patrolman followed the boy to the spot where the most terrifying moment of his existence had been lived.

"I dunno which way he went," he chattered, involuntarily clutching the patrolman's sleeve. "I never stopped to look."

The three fought their way through the tangle. At last they came out in the open and stood looking across fields to a dense grove in whose shadows squatted a little structure more hut than house.

"We'll ask over there," said Mr. Meredith.

They waded through a field of stubble and briars, crossed a ditch and on the other side of a little patch of corn found a ribbon of path that led them straight to the sagging gate of the hut, for hut it was and nothing more, with its roof a thick layer of moss and its sides utterly covered with ivy, through which a single window looked out with Cyclopean stare. The giant trees of that grove made one somber shadow; the whole place lay under a smothering silence.

Mr. Meredith strode up to the door and knocked. From inside came the sound of heavy treading. The door flung open and Albert shrank back. "That's him. That's Aaron," he gasped. The boy felt numb with the thought that all this while he and Randolph had felt utter security in that camp within a quarter mile of Aaron's lair.

The father stood facing the red-bearded man, his hands were clenching and relaxing suggestively. "Have you put your hands on my boy?"

The man shook his head, but his beady eyes did not quail under that grim challenge. "He ain't here," he said sullenly.

"How long since he left?" said the patrolman quickly.

"Little while ago."

"Oh, he was here, was he!" The father's eyebrows lifted. He took a quick step forward.

The man merely nodded.

"What was he doing here?" said Mr. Meredith.

"Gettin' his leg fixed. He hurt ut."

"No sech a thing!" shouted Albert. "Mr. Meredith, th' wasn't anything th' matter with Ranny."

There was something positively uncanny in the serpentine fixity of the man's eyes on the father's.

"Search the place," said Mr. Meredith, turning to the patrolman.

"You ken look," said Aaron to the patrolman.

The patrolman crossed the threshold and was lost in the deeper shadows.

The two men renewed their silent duel. Then: "If you're telling the truth," said Mr. Meredith slowly, "I'm going to apologize. If not—" He choked with the cold fury that made his hands clench until the knuckles were blue.

For the first time Aaron's eyes turned from the father's. He looked into space and his lips made a sound.

"What's that you're saying!"

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"To him that hath—" muttered Aaron, still looking away.

The patrolman came out. "The boy's not here," he said.

"The man's half-witted," muttered Mr. Meredith as they left the place.

For several minutes after Mr. Meredith, Albert and the patrolman had passed out of sight, the red-bearded man stood in the open doorway as though listening for the sound of their returning steps. Then, with stooping shoulders and limping step, the man walked toward the woods which walled his pathetically small clearings.

On the edge of the timber he stopped and listened. Then, as though satisfied, he limped on once more, following the course of the stream which tumbled its noisy way among lichen-etched boulders. Presently he halted, tipped forward to a giant oak and looked cautiously out. A little way beyond stood a boy with his back turned to the man. He was bending over something in his fingers. The boy straightened; he had untangled the line which now with several preliminary sweeps he cast over a stone until its fly rippled the surface of a placid, deep-shadowed pool. Instantly that pool became confusion itself. The short, slender pole in his hand bent nearly double, while the line sang and hissed through the water. Suddenly the boy gave the rod a quick side-sweeping whip. There was a fearful churning on the surface, a flashing streak through the air, and the trout landed with a plop, flapping against a dry stone with the sound of big raindrops falling on paper.

The expression that had come over that sullen, red-bearded face was miraculous. The little, shifty eyes lost their dull glow of hatred and flamed now with a childish excitement. The hard, deep lines in the weathered features softened to unbelievable gentleness. The big hands were trembling strangely.

"Right, boy!—You did ut right!" he cried, limping forward with eager speed. "Lak' I showed, like ut."

The boy wheeled, his face glorious. "Did you see me—did you see it?" cried Randolph. "Oh, ain't he a beaut! I been practicin' ever since you've been gone, an' that's th' first time I tried th' pool."

Aaron stood over the boy, chuckling. He ran horny fingers playfully through Randolph's hair. "Better later 'n 'th' ev'nin'; we try ut then together. Leg not hurtin'?"

Randolph looked down at his nether extremities. One leg was bare of shoe and stocking, the other swathed in bandages from knee to ankle.

"Gee!" he grinned, looking up into Aaron's beaming face. "I forgot all about it, Mr. Aaron. Doesn't hurt a bit." He sat down on a rock and began to unhook the flapping trout. "Did you phone my mother?"

"I jes' come back; it's all right," said Aaron, sitting down beside Randolph and cutting a slim willow sprout with his jack-knife.

"It's all right for me to stay till tomorrer? Gee, I didn't hardly believe she would!"

"You ain't scared now?" Aaron asked.

"What'm I scared of? You sure do know how to

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fix up a burn, all right. An' I betcher I c'n cast a fly as good as daddy."

Aaron looked at Randolph intently. "He teach you to cast?"

"No-o; he's so busy, you see. He works awful hard in his office. He don't have time." He reached into his hip pocket and drew out a slender alder flute, put it to his lips and blew a plaintive, low-trebling note. "I never did know how to make a flute till you showed me." He passed it to Aaron. "Play some more like you did this mornin'."

Aaron took the flute, grinned bashfully and put it to his lips. Slowly his great fingers lifted and closed down over the holes. His eyes were shut. From the slender wooden throat poured a mellow lilt that made the boy think of thrushes and bobolinks singing in chorus. He looked on, enchanted.

"He plays his—of nights sometimes," said Aaron, dreaming suddenly into space. "In th' full moon mostly."

Randolph looked perplexed. "Who do you mean? You keep on talkin' about him."

Aaron nodded, still looking off. "He's six. He sleeps days, but nights he plays, sometimes all night long. Last night he was playin' his flute down here. I heard ut. Maybe you'll hear him to-night."

They went back to the hut and sat down on a mossy stone in the deep, cool shadows of the yard.

One epochal day had come to end. The sun had set, the afterglow was gone, and now the midsummer night was made glorious by quivering stars above and drifting fireflies below.

For a long while Aaron was silent as though he listened to the katydids' nocturne and the hooting challenge of an owl. Finally he got up and went into the hut.

When he came out he carried a lighted lantern.

"You want to come?" he said.

"Where you goin'?" Randolph sat up, blinking at the lantern.

"To take him light; ut's dark."

Wondering, Randolph followed at Aaron's heels along a path twisting through swarms of fireflies. Aaron stopped, raised the lantern, and Randolph saw the low stone wall, all but hidden under its drapery of creepers. Inside the wall reared a little clump of cedars, inky black. He climbed over the wall behind the man.

Then he felt suddenly cold; he was frightened. Aaron had walked forward a few paces and was kneeling. Randolph saw the grassy mounds—two graves! And suddenly it came over him with fearful vividness—that tale they told of Aaron.

But what was the man doing? He had opened the side of a box on a stump and put in the lighted lantern. The sides of the box were glass.

"Come wind an' snow," the man was whispering, "ut won't go out. He c'n allus see to find his things."

Now he had moved to the head of one of those mounds, a very small one that lay beside the larger. Randolph's white face peered over the bent shoulders to watch those great fingers reverently raise the lid of a black-painted box at the little grave's head.

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"You look; I'll show you," whispered Aaron. "No-body's seen but you 'n' me."

He reached into the chest and brought out a stick. He held it close to the lighted box. It was an alder flute, precisely like the one he had made for Randolph this morning.

"That's his; I made ut. He liked to watch me make 'em. He c'n blow ut too. To-night, maybe, you'll hear him playin' ut out 'n th' woods. You'll think ut's a whippoorwill, but ut's him."

Randolph felt a strange tightening in his throat. All the chilling fear of this place and hour had melted under something tenderly warm that made him want to put his head on that great shoulder and cry.

"An' here's his bow, not big's th' one I'll make you tomorrer. He's jes' six: he can't bend a big un. See this arrer—see how ut's blunted? He shot it 'g'instant a tree last night maybe. I'll make him a new un.

"An' this here's his fairy-tale book. He likes th' story 'bout th' little uns lost in th' woods n' th' robins come an' covered 'em with leaves so's they wouldn't be cold."

He broke off while he opened the book with its moldy oilcloth cover and fingered its colored pages. "See?" he said—pointing to the illustrations for Babes in the Woods—"he looks at ut every night. I know, 'cause every night I look, too, to see where he's been readin'. I allus turn here. An' every night I see th' marks o' his fingers on this place plainer 'n' plainer." He closed the book.

"His mother's—"

Aaron pointed to the larger grave. "She come here

afore him, three years afore. I raised him to six, I did."

That night the boy lay on a moss-stuffed pallet, watching the moonbeams stream through the window.

Randolph awoke with the sun streaming through the window straight into his face. He moved his head and lay there watching the black squirrel that sat on the window sill barking at him for a stranger. Aaron came in with something in his hand. He walked to the window and clucked with his tongue. The squirrel leaped to his shoulder, ran down his arm and seized a corn kernel from the open palm. Then back it frisked to his shoulder and began contentedly to cut to the heart of the grain.

The boy's laugh rang joyfully, his eyes clung worshipfully to the stooping man. "Mr. Aaron, you sure do know how to make friends. Is it late?"

Aaron glanced through the window to the shadows. "Most nine," he said with a smile. "We're goin' fishin' soon's you eat?"

"You bet we are!" Randolph sprang up and began to slip into his clothes. "Then we gotter make that kite that flies without a tail, remember? An' how 'bout lookin' for that wild-bee hive in th' woods? Oh, man, we're gonna have some fun!"

Aaron's laugh rang as free as the boy's. The next instant the squirrel leaped madly from Aaron's shoulder and whisked into a dark corner. Across the threshold rushed the khaki-clad patrolman and Mr. Meredith. Events transpired with such confusing rapidity that it was only when Randolph stared incredulously at Aaron's handcuffed wrists that he realized the significance of the moment.

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"You cur." His father stood before the manacled man, red fury blazing in his eyes, his words whistling through clenched teeth. "I told you if you lied to me you'd suffer—"

He turned in blank amazement to see his son rush to Aaron's side and cling to the sleeve of the blue-flannel shirt. "What you 'restin' him for?" he cried.

The father's bloodshot eyes took in the boy's bandaged leg. He stared blankly at it. "Did—has this man harmed you, Ranny?"

"No, he didn't hurt me; he fixed my leg." The boy looked at his father challengingly. That look drove the blood surging to the man's face. He glanced at the patrolman. The latter was frowning in perplexity.

"He lied to me, Randolph," finally said the father, but somehow his accusation lacked fire. "He said you had gone home. We've looked for you all night. If it hadn't been for the neighbors who watched the place last night and saw you and then phoned me, there's no telling—"

Randolph looked up into Aaron's face. "Didn't you phone mother, an' she said I could stay all night?"

Aaron shook his head. Not once had the man's eyes left the father's. They had that same look of challenge which he had seen yesterday.

"No," said Aaron, "I didn't phone."

For a moment the boy looked hurt. Then his eyes rested on those big shackled hands that had been all gentle kindness. A tumult of passion shook the boy's soul.

"Take 'em off!" he cried, tears streaming down his cheeks. "He's a good man. He ain't any kidnaper. If

he wanted to kidnap me, he coulda done it lotsa times when me 'n' Albert were in our camp, 'cause he's been watchin' us every time we went there. He ain't any kidnaper."

"Don't fall for that stuff," pleaded the patrolman. "He's got the kid fooled. All th' neighbors say he's half-cracked. You can't trust that sort of man."

"What do his neighbors know about him?" demanded Randolph. "They never been to see him since his boy went away. Don't anybody speak to him an' all th' kids holler at him. He's lonesome, an' wanted a boy to play with; that's why he didn't telephone home, I know."

Aaron smiled at the father's troubled countenance. "To him that hath," he quoted again. "You know how ut reads? To him that hath understandin', ut means."

A deeper flush spread over the father's face. Slowly, relentlessly came the great understanding of this man's simple words. He knew what the fellow meant now. To him that hath understanding—of a boy—it shall be given—a boy's deepest love!

Yes, it was that; for the boy was explaining: "He never gets tired o' playin' with me an' makin' me things an' showing me things. He knows everything. He treats me jes' like I was his boy. Daddy, don't have him 'rested.'"

The father turned to the patrolman, his eyes looking down at the floor.

"Let him go, please."

The patrolman unlocked the steel shackles, slipped them into his pocket and strode from the hut. And still the father looked down at the floor. It had all

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come back over him with redoubled cruelty, that sting of conscience which yesterday he had felt as he drove to this place. He had been too busy to be a companion to his son; there stood the boy, worshiping an uncouth creature who had led him by the hand into Paradise.

There was jealousy in the father's eyes as he took a step forward and held out his hand to Aaron. The man seized it and smiled kindly. And so Mr. Meredith did not apologize. There was no need.

"Ye'll come back?" Aaron said to the boy.

The latter stood in the doorway, his shoes and stockings bundled under his arm. Mr. Meredith stood waiting at the sagging gate.

"You bet I will, if daddy lets me!" He ran to the gate and looked back. "Look, daddy!"

Aaron stood in the doorway, waving a great hand. On his shoulder the black squirrel was cutting at the heart of a corn kernel.

"Come along," said his father in a strange voice. "We'll phone your mother, then I want you to show me all about your camp."

## CAP'N QUILLER LISTENS IN \*

*Torrey Ford*

Two seconds after Cap'n Quiller had stowed away the last mouthful of apple pie he pushed back his chair and arose abruptly.

"Little late to-night, Ma. Mind if I shove off?"

There was abject apology in Cap'n Quiller's voice, sheepishness in his manner, but as the hands of the ship's clock on the mantel pointed to five minutes after seven the Cap'n felt that he could well afford any humility rather than be detained longer by mere food.

From her half-finished pie, Mrs. Quiller glanced up at her husband and sighed audibly—a theatrical, trumped-up-for-the-occasion sigh. She did her best to assume a long-suffering air. Her eyes travelled rapidly from her husband's eager face to the clock and back to her husband again.

"Drat your old radio," she said. "'Fore that dumb thing came into the house you allus took two helps o' apple pie. Now—"

"But there's somethin' special on to-night, Ma-pet." The Cap'n always called his wife "Ma-pet" when five minutes past seven found him absent from his radio.

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"I'd jest like to see one night come along when there wasn't nothin' special on. I never heard nothin' yet that sounded special to me—jess talkin' and music playin' and singin'. All right if you like it but *I* don't like it."

Miranda Quiller snapped her jaws together firmly to indicate that the argument was quite finished. Skillfully the Cap'n edged toward the doorway, backing cautiously until he reached a point where he could turn and bolt for the stairs that led gloriously up to his radio room.

When he had gone Mrs. Quiller promptly dropped her masque of stern austerity and a broad, satisfied smile spread across her countenance. Her wizened-up eyes actually twinkled. For she was glad—gladder than she could possibly express by smiles or twinkles—that there was something left in the world that could interest her husband to the extent of drawing him away from his favorite deep-dish apple pie.

Up-stairs the Cap'n adjusted his spectacles and viewed with supreme pride all five tubes of his radio receiving set, a set such as no man in seven counties could match or even aspire to match. The set had been professionally conceived, professionally made, and professionally installed. The Quillers had a son in the profession, so to speak; at least, Hank Quiller was rated as chief radio operator on board the *S. S. Omega* plying between New York and the West Indies. On his last trip home Hank had presented his father with the receiving set, hooked the thing up casually, given a few words of instruction, and departed.

Having already missed out on seven minutes of the

evening programme Cap'n Quiller lost few moments in gazing idly at his proud possession. Industriously he went about the intricate business of lighting up the tubes, plugging in the ear-phones, whirling the tickler into place and moving the detector dial to the exact spot where he knew Station WCOR would be on the air. The Cap'n lighted his pipe and concentrated on the voice coming over the radio.

"Live-stock market: Steers, fair to prime, 100 pounds . . . \$9.50 and \$10.40; Live Lambs, fair to prime, 100 pounds . . . \$14.00 and \$14.75; Hogs . . ."

Over these figures the Cap'n nodded appreciatively. Wonderful mechanism the radio—sit right at home and know what's going on in all parts of the world. The radio voice began to talk about the grain market. The Cap'n took two puffs from his pipe and turned the dials to WRAN. Yes, the Bedtime Story was going full blast.

"Who are you, may I ask?" said the little boy. "I'm a nephew of the sandman," said the other little boy, "and I have to go to bed every night at eight o'clock just the same as you."

The Cap'n grunted satisfaction. "Workin' swell," he mumbled.

Once more the dials moved to windward as RQAP boomed in on the high note of a soprano solo with the faint echo of a jazz orchestra in the background. A touch on the tickler and the jazz orchestra faded out giving full play of the air to the lady soloist.

The Cap'n puffed contentedly. All the local stations were working O.K. Now for distance, a complicated

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but thrilling diversion. One night the Cap'n had picked up Davenport, Iowa, as plainly as New York. He might get it again—and there was still San Francisco to be heard from. He set to it with a boyish gleam of unbridled excitement.

You would never have recognized the Captain Quiller at his radio as the same man who two months earlier had been nothing more than a fireside brooder. Not that the Cap'n had so much to brood about, but what little he did have he enlarged upon and magnified until he worked up a case of despondency that began to approach *melancholia nolum dementia*, as the village doctor quaintly put it.

The main trouble with the Cap'n was that he considered himself still a young man and had nothing to do. After forty-five years of excitement on the high seas he found himself settled down in a sleepy little South Jersey fishing village with the years dragging slowly on toward nothing in particular. If the Cap'n had retired voluntarily, things might have been different; for then he could have gathered around him other old salts of Baytown and lived over and over again his years in command of the finest sailing vessels on the coast, his later years on steam craft. But the Cap'n had not retired voluntarily. Retiring was about the last thing in the world he would have considered.

"Only lazybones retire," he grumbled. "Others go on and on."

At sixty-three the Cap'n looked forward to nearly a score more years of active duty. But when he mistook Jupiter Light for Fire Island, not to mention the time he went cruising down the coast forgetting

completely to stop off at Savannah and pick up a cargo bound for Buenos Ayres—well, to put the matter mildly, the Consolidated Shipping Lines decided it was time Captain Quiller went on the inactive list.

The Cap'n retired to his fireside and his brooding while Miranda Quiller faced the impossible task of evolving distractions that might prod him into the least semblance of enthusiasm for carrying on with life as he found it. Summers were not so bad, for then the Cap'n could potter around the yard messing with the few rows of vegetables and nursing the flowers, or he could go down the bay fishing when the weakfish were running, or he could amble down to the store to do errands artfully invented by Mrs. Quiller throughout the day. The winters, however, were terrific ordeals both for the Cap'n and for Mrs. Quiller until—blessed be the day—the broadcasting bug bit deep in the Cap'n's tough hide.

Which explains, perhaps, why Mrs. Quiller smiled to herself after the Cap'n had walked out on her half-finished meal and why she looked forward with no great pleasure to the day when the radio would cease to number among its victims her adored but frequently irascible mate.

That day seemed quite remote just now with the Cap'n having successfully tuned in on a church service one thousand miles from Baytown. The Cap'n was at the head of the stairs calling excitedly.

“Miranda! Miranda Quiller! All hands on the top deck. I've got St. Louis on the loud speaker. Come quick!”

Mrs. Quiller refused to get excited.

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"We can hear it all right down here. Rozie Brown is over talkin' and settin' with me."

"Ah, Ma, come on up. Bring Rozie along. I want her to hear a loud speaker as is a loud speaker."

"All right, Uncle Lyman. We're coming this very minute."

It was Rozie who made the decision. Rosamund Brown lived next door, a comely, rosy-cheeked girl in her early twenties who wasn't too stuck up to come in and talk with old folks. Besides, there was something or other between Rozie and Hank Quiller; neither the Cap'n nor Mrs. Quiller knew just what. Rozie had many beaux and Hank might be just one of the long string. At any rate, when Hank was ashore he had first call on Rozie's dates.

"Isn't it perfectly wonderful!" Rozie enthused as she took a seat in the radio room that echoed with "Nearer, My God, to Thee" as chorused by the entire congregation of the First M. E. Church in St. Louis, Mo.

The Cap'n gestured magnificently toward his five-tube set. "Ain't it unbelievable?"

Mrs. Quiller sniffed. "You're the one that's unbelievable, Lyman. The Lord knows I've tried hard enough to git you inside of a church here to home."

The hymn in St. Louis swelled to a finish; the "Amen," amplified to the last unit of capacity in Cap'n Quiller's set, filled the room.

"Let us pray," said the St. Louis pastor.

Mrs. Quiller and Rosamund bowed their heads reverently. The Cap'n, blushing furiously, bent over the radio not knowing whether to submit himself frankly

to reverence or to pretend the second stage of amplification needed slight readjustment. The prayer droned on leaving the Cap'n undecided. When it came to an end the choir sang a Gloria response, a soft-toned harmony that sent the thrills chasing up and down the spines of the three listeners.

The Cap'n was the first to lift his head. "Now let's have a little jazz."

He proceeded by degrees and notches on the dials toward jazz. Along the way, there burst from the loud speaker a symphony orchestra in full volume.

"Oh, a symphony! Do let us hear some of that, Uncle Lyman."

"Anything to oblige a lady." With deft fingers the Cap'n tuned the symphony in—tuned it out a couple of times by mistake and finally brought it in closer and closer until you could almost hear the swish of the conductor's baton. "How's that for a little old hand-made set?"

"Marvellous! Beautiful!"

"Real nice music," said Mrs. Quiller, nodding over her sewing and struggling to beat time with her foot to a Sonata that followed none of the accepted rules of music as she knew it.

"High-toned stuff, all right." The Cap'n pulled at his pipe. Personally he preferred a different brand of entertainment, but there was no accounting for tastes. He sat back contentedly and watched Rozie.

The symphony ran its smooth course, dipping into peaceful valleys where only soft strings could be heard, mounting to joyous peaks with horns, cellos, harps, and drums. . . . At last came the finale—a terrific

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finale with the kettles booming and the cymbals crashing. The loud speaker vibrated with a low thunder.

"They're applaudin' now," exclaimed the Cap'n.

Rosamund joined in the applause. "Encore! Encore!" she shouted gaily.

The encore came, more Sonata perhaps or somebody's Melody in E Minor. Rosamund smiled happily while Mrs. Quiller nodded almost to slumberland. The Cap'n eyed them both curiously. He wondered if there really was anything between Hank and Rozie and, if there was, why couldn't Miranda get Rozie to tell her all about it.

Whir! Click! Bang!

The Cap'n jumped from his repose toward the dials. Before he could reach out, a husky voice spoke through the horn.

"The air! The air! For God's sake, give us the air!" Then came more whirring, more clicking, followed by a dead silence.

"Well, I'll be hog-swoggled," exclaimed the Cap'n. "Ain't that queer!" He turned the dials this way and that. Nothing came.

Mrs. Quiller woke up with a start. "Quit monkeyin', Lyman. That was nice music."

"Sure it was nice but it's faded dead out on us now. Can't get nothin'. Must be somethin' wrong."

"Don't you want me to call Willie, Uncle Lyman? He's a good fixer."

"No, thanks, Rozie. Don't want to bother the boy. Had him over last night." The Cap'n whirled dials frantically but vainly.

Mrs. Quiller was disturbed. "Do call Willie, Rosa-

mund. He'll just get it all out of whack without Willie."

Rosamund went to the window and called across to where her brother had his makeshift set hooked up. After a moment or so he resounded. "Come over a minute," called Rosamund. "Uncle Lyman's set has stopped working."

"'S'all right," came Willie's shrill reply. "They just announced there's an S O S signal in the air and all broadcasting has been discontinued. Didn't you hear the government man askin' for the air? 'S'all right. They'll start up again in a little while."

The Cap'n received the news glumly. What rotten luck! The one night in the week he had gathered a fair-sized audience in front of his radio, some ship had to go and get in trouble and stop all his fun. He sat back gloomily in his chair and let his pipe go out. He was thoroughly annoyed. Mrs. Quiller and Rosamund didn't take the interruption quite so much to heart. They rather enjoyed the excitement of an S O S in the air. It was different and therefore thrilling.

A half-hour later the radio party was still in a position of status quo—no music floated through the air, no singing, no talking, a dull evening. Suddenly the front door flew open with a crash and up the stairs came Willie Brown three steps at a time. He arrived red-faced and breathless, struggling to say something but only puffs and blows coming from his mouth.

"Well, Willie," said Rosamund, with the customary sisterly sarcasm to younger brothers. "What's it all about?"

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Willie manœuvred his lips into a position where words were possible. "Hank! Hank's ship!"

"What about Hank's ship?"

"It's him sendin' the S O S. I heard it awful faint—KDP, KDP. That's Hank."

The Cap'n collapsed completely. All his life he had faced dangers like this, but with the boy it was different. He was too young, too inexperienced, too unschooled in the ways of the sea to be tossed recklessly into a real crisis. What would the boy be saying, what would he be thinking, what would he be doing? No, no—it couldn't be.

Mrs. Quiller, slower to understand, watched her husband's collapse before she realized what Willie's message meant. A dull moan was the only sign she gave. She took off her spectacles and sat back white and silent. Something had happened to Hank—something mysterious and terrible.

To Rosamund fell full responsibility. With trembling lips she began to interrogate Willie.

"You don't know it's Hank's ship, do you, Willie? Nobody told you, did they? You just guessed it, didn't you?"

Willie, frightened by the seriousness with which his announcement had been received, wished he hadn't said anything. "I ain't sure, of course. But I know Hank's signal, KDP, and it sounded just like it to me. Awful faint but I've heard it lots and lots when he's been near New York."

The Cap'n lifted his head. He had a ray of hope. "Hank's down off Cuba now, more'n a thousand miles

away. That set of yourn only receives a few hundred miles, don't it, Willie?"

"That's all, Uncle Lyman. I might 'a' been mistaken."

The Cap'n got up and comforted his wife. "There, there, Ma. Don't take on so. It ain't Hank's boat. Willie made a mistake."

Mrs. Quiller continued to sob softly. "I'm afraid he is right, Lyman. I have a feelin' the boy's in danger."

"Oh, tut, tut. Can't be, Ma. Jess to satisfy you though we'll let Willie tune in and see what he can hear."

Willie brightened. "If there is anything to hear, we ought to get it on your set, Uncle Lyman."

"Go to it, boy."

Willie approached the radio with a professional air. He swung the dials round to where he could receive the commercial wave-lengths. Instantly the loud speaker vibrated with staccato screeches, impatient, imperative demands spelled out in telegraphic language.

"That's a government station sending," announced Willie. "Gee, I wished I knew what they was saying." More screeches followed in a different key. "Another government station."

There came a silence that seemed ominous to the intent little group gathered in front of the radio. The Cap'n suggested a slight turn on the vernier, but Willie vetoed the suggestion. There was nothing to do but wait, and as they waited the Cap'n's spirits returned and Mrs. Quiller became less afraid. Rosamund

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was more ready to cry at this particular moment than at any time before—cry or laugh, she couldn't decide just which.

Willie was the first to hear it, a feeble far-off wail—click-click, cluck, click; click-click, cluck, click.

"Listen!" breathed Willie hoarsely. "That's Hank."

Again it came, faintly—click-click, cluck, click; click-click, cluck, click.

Cap'n Quiller paled. "Sounds like what Hank told me to listen for. But I can't be sure."

"I'm sure," declared Willie. "Sure as anything. I've heard KDP too often not to know it now."

A long series of faint clicks stammered through the horn, mystic, maddening clicks that meant nothing to those who listened but that might mean life and death to those who were sending hundreds of miles away. Cold sweat stood on the Cap'n's brow. Never before had he felt so helpless with tragedy pending.

"We gotta do somethin'," he kept mumbling. "We can't jess set here and wonder what's goin' on. We gotta know what he's sayin', whoever it is that is sayin' somethin'."

"Mr. Billings can read it slick'n butter," suggested Willie.

"Ed Billings, the telegraph operator?"

"That's him. He knows lots of the wireless codes. He had a bunch of us boys over to Sam's the other night readin' all the ship talk and everything."

"Think you can git ahold of him to-night?"

"You bet I kin. Have him up here in a jiffy."

Willie left on the run. The Cap'n paced the room

impatiently, stopping now and then in front of the horn to listen to the faint clicks, to the loud staccato screeches, to the whirs and whistles of the ever-present static. Mrs. Quiller, huddled in her chair, watched the Cap'n's face eagerly, reading there every worry he felt and sharing them with him. Rosamund hovered about, wringing her hands nervously and trying to think of something to relieve the tension.

"Can't I make you a nice hot cup of tea, Aunt Miranda?"

"No, thanks, child. I'm all right. I wisht Ed Billings would hurry up and come."

"He's acomin'," said the Cap'n from the window. "I can see his lantern bobbin' up and down. Willie's got him runnin'."

Ed Billings didn't often run. He was a slow-moving type who saved his efforts for calamities and catastrophes. When Willie burst in on him, at the Baytown Pool & Billiard Emporium, he had apparently been able to convince Mr. Billings that the moment for action had come. By the time Mr. Billings arrived at the Quiller household he was completely exhausted and quite out of breath. He climbed the stairs slowly and laboriously.

"What's this about Hank's ship bein' in trouble?" he managed to inquire.

"Dunno, Ed. May be Hank and may not. Sounds like him but we can't tell. Set over here near the horn and see what you can make out."

Mr. Billings sank into the Cap'n's chair in front of the radio. As a new series of sharp notes came from

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the horn, he wrinkled his brow and listened closely. He took out a crumpled telegraph blank and a stub pencil, but made no notes.

"Key West sendin'," he said. "Code word for 'Who are yer and where are yer?'"

The sharp notes ceased. Soon the faint clicking began. Mr. Billings cocked his right ear and began writing slowly with his pencil. "Gettin' anything, Ed?" asked the Cap'n.

Mr. Billings frowned. "Nothing but C. S. L., C. S. L."

Cap'n Quiller gasped. "Consolidated Shipping Lines. Go on listenin', Ed."

"S. S. *Omega*. Is that Hank's ship?"

"Yup." The Cap'n's head was bowed.

"Lying forty miles south of Pedro Keys."

"My God! South o' Jamaicy. Don't I know them Keys." The faint clicking went on rapidly. "What's he sayin' now, Ed?"

"Been . . . in . . . collision." Mr. Billings spelled out the words as he wrote them down. "With . . . unknown . . . tramp. . . . Hole . . . stove . . . in . . . port . . . side . . . aft . . . of . . . for'castle. . . . Heavy . . . list . . . to . . . port . . . taking . . . in . . . water . . . fast . . . pumps . . . working. . . ."

A dull thud on the floor interrupted the receiving. Mrs. Quiller had fainted. The Cap'n picked her up gently and carried her across the hall to a bedroom. Rosamund was close behind.

"Give her a drink of brandy when she comes to," he whispered to Rosamund. "You'll find it in a flask in my left-hand bureau drawer." He tiptoed

back to the radio-room. The messages were still coming in.

"Key West sendin' again," Willie informed him.

"They're askin' for verification of position and name of ship," Mr. Billings confided between dots and dashes.

"Forty miles south of Pedro Keys ought to be plain enough for any land-lubber. 'Bout eight hours out from Kingston in fair weather." The Cap'n shook his head dolefully. "Bad place to be. Ain't much travel that way these days."

When the faint clicking began again, Mr. Billings started writing but stopped after a moment. "He's giving his position again same as before, only this time he says S. S. *Omega* in command of Captain Peters."

The Cap'n nodded. "Buck Peters, used to second mate fer me. Knows the sea all right but don't know the *Omega* much. Ain't but his second trip aboard her. Gosh, I wish I was aboard. Perhaps I don't know the *Omega*. Had her fourteen trips running when she was spankin' new."

Key West boomed in with a brief stuttering phrase. Mr. Billings translated it as it came.

"S. S. *Omega*. . . . How . . . long . . . will . . . you . . . float?"

There was some delay before the answering faint clicks trickled in. "God . . . willing . . . we . . . should . . . keep . . . heads . . . above . . . water . . . four . . . to . . . six . . . hours. . . ."

"Hell!" commented the Cap'n vehemently. "What's the matter with Peters! With a hole stove

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clear through the *Omega* he ought to keep her floatin' longer than that. Ain't a trimmer ship on the coast."

Mr. Billings put his fingers to his lips. "Key West again. 'Keep . . . up . . . courage . . . *Omega*. . . . Warning . . . all . . . ships . . . to . . . watch . . . for . . . you. . . . Trying . . . to . . . get . . . in . . . touch . . . with Kingston. . . . Hope . . . to . . . start . . . rescue . . . ship . . . from . . . there. . . . Stand . . . by' . . .'"

Rosamund touched the Cap'n on the elbow. "Aunt Miranda is feeling better again. She wants to know what you have heard from Hank."

"What we've heard, eh?" The Cap'n looked up in a daze, his lips trembled as he tried to form words. "You tell Miranda Hank's all right—gettin' along fine. And tell her Hank jess sent his particular love to his Mama and—and to you, Rozie."

Rosamund flushed and choked back the sobs. "Oh, Uncle Lyman, do tell me if you think Hank is in terrible danger."

"Danger? Tut, tut! 'Course he ain't. Jess havin' a little mite of a close shave. Don't you worry none, Rozie, Hank's comin' though with flyin' colors."

"I hope so hard he is, Uncle Lyman. He's just the sweetest, dearest friend I've got in the world and I love him."

After she had gone out of the room, the Cap'n remarked: "Wish we could broadcast that little speech to Hank. Might chirk him up some. A fellow can feel awful lonely on the sea when there's nothin' between him and Davey Jones' locker but a few thin strips of boards with holes in 'em." The Cap'n

drummed impatiently on the table with his pipe.  
“Why ain’t anythin’ comin’ in now, Ed?”

“Guess Key West is sendin’ out on a different wave-length. We better hold on here where we know we can pick up the *Omega*.”

The Cap’n staggered to his feet and wandered aimlessly about the room. He went in to see Mrs. Quiller for a few moments but was back shortly with a wan, forlorn expression.

“Anythin’ more Ed?”

“Nothing yet, Lyman.”

Willie Brown had not opened his mouth once since the arrival of Mr. Billings. With eyes glued to the radio, he sat curled up in a chair, motionless, expressionless, taking in every detail of the tragedy but offering no comment or suggestions. Now, however, Willie had something on his mind.

“Uncle Lyman.”

“Yes, boy.” The Cap’n did not lift his head.

“Wasn’t them blue-prints you was showing me last year the plans of Hank’s ship?”

“Guess they was, Willie. I don’t remember exactly. What about ‘em?”

Willie faltered. “Nothing. Nothing particular. Thought you might figure out on ‘em about where she’s stove in.”

The Cap’n grasped at the idea. It provided a means of relief from the strain of inactivity. He pulled out the lower drawer of his desk and pawed over a mass of papers until he came to a long roll of blue-prints that had a large “S. S. *Omega*” scrawled across the back. He spread the plans out on the desk and bent

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over them with Willie peering over his shoulder.

"Aft of the for'castle. Lemme see now. Port side." The Cap'n's finger wavered as he pointed to the spot. "About there I reckon is where she's stove. Ain't so bad there. Lots worse places she might ha' been hit. No, sir, ain't so bad there. Looks like—no, couldn't be, couldn't be."

"Looks like what, Uncle Lyman?"

"Looks like she might be hit in number eight hold but couldn't be there. No, if 'twas there, Buck Peters would close them XY doors and she'd be tight as a drum."

The radio broke in abruptly. It was a long message from the Key West station. Mr. Billings waited until the end before he interpreted it.

"Key West says the only boat under steam in the Kingston harbor is the *Arabella*, a privately owned pleasure-craft. She's headin' out of the harbor now with everythin' wide open and expects to make the *Omega* in six to seven hours. Key West asks the *Omega* to get in touch with the *Arabella*. Sounds promisin', don't it, Lyman?"

"Promisin', sure. If Buck Peters can only keep afloat that long."

Mr. Billings leaned toward the horn. "Here comes Hank in again: 'Thank . . . God . . . for . . . *Arabella*. . . . Hope . . . we . . . can . . . hold . . . out. . . . Listing . . . badly . . . water . . . in . . . engine . . . room . . . getting . . . deeper. . . . Deck-engines . . . may help . . . with pumps. . . . Heavy . . . sea . . . running. . . . All . . . cheerful . . . so long.' . . ."

Back at his desk the Cap'n studied the blue-prints

of the *Omega*. He was puzzled. What was Buck Peters worrying about keeping afloat for when his first report had been that the damage was aft of the for'castle? If the XY doors wouldn't shut out the main leak, what about the BX doors thirty foot astern? The Cap'n tapped the desk with a pencil. Something was mighty darn queer.

Suddenly it came to him. He turned and pounded Willie Brown on the back excitedly.

"I got it, boy! 'Cause he ain't got the XY doors shet. He don't even know about 'em. There's a galley been built in there right in front of them doors. All he's got to do is tear out a beaver-board wall, close them XY doors, fill up number seven hold on the starboard, and she'll float until Hell freezes over."

The Cap'n pounded the desk as he talked. Ed Billings stared at him open-mouthed.

"Wa-al, Lyman, what are you goin' to do about it?"

Cap'n Quiller slumped again. "That's the ketch. Here I am on dry land figgerin' out what Buck Peters should be doin' off Pedro Keys. 'N I may be wrong at that. Gosh but I'd like to know if Buck knows about them XY doors."

Willie had a suggestion. "You might wire Key West to ask him."

Ed Billings shook his head. "They wouldn't pay no attention to a private message. But say, Lyman, why couldn't you call up the company in New York and have them wire Key West to shoot out a few words of advice comin' straight from headquarters?"

It was the Cap'n's turn to shake his head dubiously. He had a mental picture of some fresh young night

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clerk in the office of the Consolidated Shipping Lines chuckling over the phone at his idea of broadcasting advice to the *Omega*. Still, if he could catch Old Man Snyder in the office he might be able to convince him that even an ex-captain on the retired list might know something or other about the *Omega*.

As it happened Old Man Snyder was at his desk when the Cap'n's phone call came in. It was a hectic night in the offices of the Consolidated Shipping Lines. There were none of the smiles, jokes or idling groups that customarily went with an evening session —only grim, determined faces, frowns, and high-pitched voices. The *Omega*, pride of the Lines, was in trouble. Nearly every man in the office had a friend or kin on board the *Omega*. As general manager and directing genius of the Lines, Old Man Snyder had more friends and more kin on board the *Omega* than any of the others. Buck Peters was his wife's own nephew. . . . It was a bad night for the old man.

A clerk poked his head in Snyder's door. "There's a Captain Quiller on the phone wants to speak to you, sir."

Old Man Snyder waved a protest. "Got a son on board, hasn't he? Can't talk with him. Connect him with Hayes."

A few minutes later the clerk was back. "He says he doesn't want to ask about his son. Says he's got a private message he must deliver to you personally."

"Oh, well." Snyder picked up the telephone. "Give me that call from Captain Quiller. . . . Hello—

Quiller. Sure. All right, let it come. Galley in number eight hold. What about it? Hold on there. Say that again. Don't shout. I can hear you all right. Now let it come slowly. . . . Tear out galley in number eight. Yes, yes, go on. Close XY and BX doors. Fill number seven on starboard. Is that all? Thanks. Thanks a lot. You ought to know if anybody does. We'll get busy on that right away. G'bye." Snyder turned to the clerk. "Get that Key West Government Station on the long distance at once. Send Bixby and Steele in here on the run."

Less than a half-hour later Cap'n Quiller sitting in his Baytown radio-room heard Key West sending out into the air his advice to Captain Peters on board the *Omega*. Ed Billings was more excited about it than the Cap'n.

"They're sendin' it out jest as you told 'em, Lyman."

The Cap'n groaned. "Yup. Jess as I told 'em. An' I may be so dead wrong they'll be laughin' at me on all of the seven seas. But godfrey! with a boy on board it ain't goin' to hurt me none to make a fool of myself when there's a chance it may help."

Breathlessly they waited for a response to the message from Hank. At last it came.

"Advice . . . received. . . . Captain Peters . . . sends . . . thanks . . . to . . . C. S. L. . . . Investigating . . . XY doors . . . BX doors . . . closed . . . immediately . . . after . . . collision. . . . In . . .

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communication . . . with . . . *Arabella* . . . Hope . . . she . . . arrives . . . in . . . time. . . . Settling . . . fast . . . to . . . port. . . . ”

From the ship's clock in the dining-room came the sharp chiming of four bells. Through the village echoed the striking of ten o'clock from the tower of the First Baptist Church. The Cap'n bowed his head humbly. He was praying for Hank.

The big window to the east that had loomed inky-black all night suddenly began to take on a grayish blue. The gray faded out as the blue came in stronger and stronger. Somewhere a cock crowed. Another and still another cock. It was dawn in Baytown.

Mrs. Quiller stirred uneasily on the couch. Rosamund reached over and patted her reassuringly. By the window Cap'n Quiller stared out hollow-eyed—the night had made him an old man. Ed Billings dozed in his chair. Willie Brown stood guard by the radio.

The last message had come in around two-thirty. It told briefly of an attempt to launch a life-boat, of the loss of fourteen men, of the others waiting bravely on board for the inevitable. The *Arabella* had not been sighted. Earlier there had been a private message from Captain Peters; a farewell and his regret that he had not known about the XY doors in time to do more good. There had also been a private message from Hank: “Good-by and love to all, including Rozie.” Rosamund had wept on Mrs. Quiller’s shoulder when this came in, the only time during the long night that she gave any indication of breaking down.

With the first rays of light Rosamund got up stiffly

and stole quietly down-stairs. There were sounds of a fire in the making, later the pungent aroma of coffee. Apparently the smell of coffee penetrated to Mr. Billings's nostrils for he woke up and looked expectant. Rosamund called for Willie to carry up the tray. Besides the pot of coffee there were doughnuts and thinly sliced pieces of buttered toast.

Cap'n Quiller thanked Rozie but could take nothing. He tried a mouthful of coffee, gulped, and put the cup down quickly.

"Sticks in my throat," he said. "Thanks jess the same, girlie."

As Mrs. Quiller was still asleep, Ed Billings and Willie Brown shared the breakfast. After the fourth doughnut Mr. Billings sighed contentedly and dozed off again. This pleased Willie, for sleepy-eyed as he was he enjoyed the importance of being official guardian of the radio.

At ten minutes of five the telephone began ringing, long impetuous rings intended to rouse a sleeping household if necessary. It woke Mrs. Quiller and Ed Billings, and kept on ringing. No one made a move toward answering it. Each looked at the other, awed, fearful. The Cap'n lifted appealing eyes to Rosamund.

"Probably somebody has the wrong number," she said and tripped out of the room. When she came back her lips were trembling, all the color had left her face. Her voice faltered. "A Mr. Snyder in New York wants to speak to you, Uncle Lyman."

"Old Man Snyder, eh?" The Cap'n's jaw dropped. "What's he wantin' this time o' mornin'?"

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Slowly Cap'n Quiller got up and shambled wearily out, each stair creaking as he made his way down to the telephone. A deathlike stillness came over the radio-room broken only by soft sobbing from Rosamund, who had hidden her head on Mrs Quiller's bosom. She was breaking under the strain.

The Cap'n's crackling voice, raised to a telephone pitch, floated up the stairs.

"What's that? Yup. This is Quiller. . . . Whaddye say? No, no. We ain't heard nothin' since 'bout two-thirty. . . . Safe? Thank God!" The Cap'n was half-way up the stairs. "Hank's safe! Safe 'n well 'n happy. Whoopie! Wait until I hear more and I'll tell yer."

Mrs. Quiller and Rosamund both cried, unashamed. Willie executed a jig that threatened momentarily to damage beyond repair the best radio receiving set in seven counties. Ed Billings gawped foolishly at the proceedings, wanting to join in the celebration but not knowing just where to begin. Finally he compromised by eating another doughnut. No one tried to overhear the rest of the Cap'n's conversation: Hank was safe and that was all that really mattered.

Some time elapsed before the Cap'n finished talking with Old Man Snyder. When he reappeared in the radio-room, he was no longer hollow-eyed. He was a young man again. There was a positive swagger to his walk as he came in. He went over and kissed his wife and patted Rosamund fondly before he told his news.

"The boy's safe. Had a narrow squeak but he came through all right jess as I knowed he would all along.

The Consolidated had a message relayed through Kingston tellin' all about it. The *Arabella*—she was the boat that put out from Kingston—got there after the *Omega* had gone down. She picked up forty-six men floatin' around on rafts and pieces of wreckage. Hank was among 'em they know sure because he was doin' the sendin' from the *Arabella*. They're puttin' back to Kingston now and will ship home on a passenger-liner. The boy ought to be here sometime next week. Guess we'll have to stage a welcome-home party for him, eh, Ma-pet?

" 'N' say, Willie, we was right about the XY doors. Old Man Snyder says so himself. Only it was too late when they got our message. Helped some, Snyder said, but not enough. Snyder said a lot more but it wouldn't concern you folks."

The Cap'n smiled enigmatically. Apparently he was cherishing a secret that pleased him immensely.

Later Cap'n Quiller found himself out on the beach striding up and down close to the waves. He was dog-tired, but not too tired to walk and gaze out at the sea. He could think better that way, especially when he had a lot to think about. Old Man Snyder had offered him his old berth with the Consolidated. He was to be a full-fledged captain again in good standing. Besides this, he could take his pick of the Consolidated fleet to command. It was a tempting offer to a young man of sixty-three.

Still, there were two sides to the question. If he went back to seafaring, it would mean leaving Miranda alone again. Miranda was getting on—not old to be sure, but not as spry as she used to be and less

adaptable to getting along by herself. And even if he did refuse Snyder's offer, he could consider himself legitimately a retired sea captain. There would be no taint to his retirement. It would be of his own volition. He could join in with the old sea-dogs in the Baytown General Store without a blush or blemish to his career. Yes, there was considerable room for debate as to just what he should do. In all, however, a pleasant debate.

The Cap'n had not made up his mind one way or the other when he got back to the house. He found Rosamund and Mrs. Quiller on the steps, both with happy smiling faces. Mrs. Quiller's eyes gleamed with excitement.

"I've got a secret to tell you, Lyman."

"Secret! Well, I swan. Jess in the mood for secrets, I am."

"It's about Rozie. She just told me."

"Oh, about Rozie. That's easy. I only need one guess: she's goin' to marry Ed Billings."

They all laughed.

"Guess again."

"She ain't goin' to marry our Hank, is she?"

Rozie put both arms around the Cap'n neck. "That's what, Uncle Lyman, and isn't it too wonderful! He asked me when he was home the last time and I am to give him my answer when he comes back. Oh, but I'm so relieved he *is* coming back, for I had my mind made up all along."

The Cap'n kissed her. "Good for you, girlie. I'm tickled pink about it. This fake uncle stuff between you and me never was jess right. I'd lots rather try

and be a father to you. And Miranda here won't make such a bad mother, will she?"

"Simply wonderful," breathed Rosamund ecstatically.

Up-stairs again the Cap'n should have gone straight to bed. Instead he wandered in to his radio, lighted the tubes and plugged in the ear phones. Presently he heard the faint strains of a dance orchestra. A touch on the vernier and the music swelled to its full proportion. The station was announced: RNOW, San Francisco, California. The Cap'n grinned triumphantly. San Francisco hadn't gone to bed yet. Why should he? More dance music came in broadcasted direct from the ballroom.

"Workin' swell," mumbled the Cap'n and reached for his pipe.

Which meant, if you understood it correctly, that the Cap'n had made up his mind about Old Man Snyder's offer. Cap'n Quiller had definitely retired from the sea. But there were no tears about his retirement—not a one. With a front-row seat in the radio audience he was safe and happy and still a young-old man. What more could any man ask?

## FATHER AND SON \*

*Elias Tobenkin*

WHEN Victor Selz, junior member of the Birnbaum, Weiss and Selz Company, manufacturers of cloaks, entered the office at ten o'clock that morning, his haggard face indicated that he had spent a sleepless night. Nodding to the clerk and stenographer, he hurried on to a little side room, which was midway between a shop and an office, and which he used as his own workroom when he was planning and drawing new designs in fashions. He sank into a chair, produced a thick envelope from his pocket, and began staring at it with a vacant look.

The painful feeling which seized him the previous afternoon, when the rabbi handed him that packet, and which had tortured him throughout the night, had now settled into a vague uncertainty and disagreeableness. For the hundredth time he opened up the packet and examined the piece of parchment with the twelve lines on it, the ominous "twelve lines," written in square Hebrew characters, from right to left, which were to separate, to divorce him forever from his wife.

According to his previously arranged plan all he had

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to do now was to mail that packet, the "writ of divorce," to his wife in Russia, and then he would once more be a free man—free to propose to Miss Morgenstern.

As he thought of this last step, however, of mailing the packet, the village where he was born and raised, where he married his wife, Sarah,—the tall, slender Sarah, with her raven hair and soft lashes,—arose before his eyes. He could see his wife sitting at that very moment in front of the little store on the market place, thinking of him, wondering how soon he would remember her, write to her, send for her, for their child—

He was seeing, too, that morning two weeks later, when the packet would arrive, the trembling fingers with which his wife would grab it from the postman, the joy, bordering on hysteria, with which she would tear it open, look at the contents, and then—then—utter a sharp cry as if she had been stabbed, and fall to the ground. She had touched the parchment with her hand. According to the law of Moses and Israel, she was divorced from her husband forever.

Tears came into his eyes, tears for his wife, Sarah, for he had nothing against her. Only he had grown so far apart from her during the seven years which he had been away that it seemed easier to send her a divorce than to bring her to him, to New York. He began to review the events in his life during the years which he had been in America.

When Wolf Salzman—for such was his name in Russia—first landed in New York, he was in a miserable plight. His constitution was too delicate, his tem-

per too irritable, to become accustomed to the hard, grinding work of the sweatshop. He earned little and saw little or no future ahead of him. Besides, the yearning for Sarah, the longing for his wife and child, consumed all his energy and ambition. For two years every letter he wrote home was blurred with tears. Then, at the advice of a friendly foreman, he began to learn a new branch in his trade. After some months he became a cutter. His wages went up by leaps and bounds, work was easier, and life assumed a more pleasant and promising aspect.

At the close of the third year he began thinking of bringing over Sarah and their child, when the boss where he worked suggested that he learn designing. Wolf Salzman, who had by this time become Victor Selz, would make a good designer, the employer thought.

Six months elapsed in work and study. During that time Selz wrote to his wife but rarely. The work and study had enwrapped all his thought and attention. At the end of the six months he was earning sixty dollars a week. And here his first impulse was to make up for all that he had suffered. He began to live; he made friends; he was successful, and every one was eager to tell him so, to compliment him upon it. At that time Selz was thirty years old. To his associates he was a young man, just starting out in life, a "boy" with chances for a future. Selz himself had tasted power and was drunk with the desire to succeed, to forge his way ahead. With such thoughts in his mind it is needless to say that he wrote to his wife but two short missives during the following six months.

During that time Selz had shown such ability as a designer of fashions and made himself so indispensable to his employers that he was taken in as a partner, and the firm of Birnbaum and Weiss became the Birnbaum, Weiss and Selz Company.

Selz suddenly found himself in a new world. He no longer lived on the East Side among his fellow townsmen, but up-town. At first he had somehow postponed writing to his wife about the change in his fortune from week to week, and then the desire to write to her grew fainter and fainter. The picture of his wife became dimmer day by day and the space which her face formerly occupied in his brain now remained there like a piece of pale, blank canvas. And when he went out to lunch with Mr. Birnbaum or Mr. Weiss, to Habermeyer's restaurant, on Broadway, and sat there at the same table with Mr. Eisendrat, and Strauss, and Morgenstern, the latter of whom was considered a wizard in the world of cloaks and clothing, he did not have the courage to think of his wife, who was waiting for him in that far-away Russian village.

Then came invitations to visit the people with whom he lunched, at their homes. And here Miss Morgenstern came upon the scene, and with her appearance the last link which connected Selz with his wife, and with their four-year-old, by this time eleven-year-old, son, was broken.

Miss Morgenstern was neither young nor beautiful. But what she lacked in beauty she made up in diamonds, and what she had over and above in years, she made up for in her sentimental nature and in her earnest desire to get married. Mr. Selz, she knew, was

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of humble origin, and far below her socially, but he was rising, rising rapidly, and was an assured success in the world of cloaks and clothing.

To Selz, on the other hand, Miss Morgenstern was the avenue which led to the inner circle of the clothing kings. With Morgenstern as his father-in-law he would at once become a recognized power. So this romance wove and spun itself for nearly two and a half years. For, eager as Miss Morgenstern was to marry, she could not possibly think of marrying Mr. Selz before she had, so to say, thoroughly rubbed off his rough edges. Self-made men, she often said to herself, need to be polished carefully before they are fit to put on exhibition.

Now, however, Miss Morgenstern was approaching the end of this polishing and training period and began leading on toward an open climax—a public engagement. It was in preparation for this event that Selz sought out a rabbi on the East Side, gave him the sum of fifteen dollars for a piece of parchment containing the twelve lines, which, according to the law of Moses and Israel was to divorce him from his wife the minute his wife took the document in her hand.

Two hours later Mr. Selz still was musing at his desk in his little workroom. He did not hurry to address the envelope, but put it back in his inside pocket. It was twelve o'clock, so he went to lunch.

When Mr. Selz emerged from the restaurant an hour later there was but a vague trace of the gloom and doubt, which had disturbed him all night and morning, left in his countenance and demeanor. And

this vague trace, too, was rapidly disappearing as he strolled down Broadway enjoying the warm rays of the April sun.

But, more than the April sun, the smile and greeting of Mr. Morgenstern helped clear his brain from the fog which had settled upon it the previous afternoon. Mr. Morgenstern was especially attentive to him that morning. He talked and jested with Selz so freely that Eisendrat and Strauss and a few other garment manufacturers who sat beside them increased their respect for Selz a hundredfold.

"I am not the first nor the only one," Selz thought as he strolled down the street. "The papers are full of divorces every day. Besides, she will be better off this way than if I were to bring her here. We could never be happy together now. She would find it hard to learn the ways of the New World. At home the little store gives a pretty good living."

Here Selz even became magnanimous. Together with the divorce he thought he would send her a check for five hundred dollars. That would be a fortune in the small town where she lived.

At this his heart became light and he wanted to do something, to compensate himself, as it were, for the qualms and misgivings he had gone through the previous night and morning. On the corner an Italian boy was selling flowers. Selz knew that young men often send flowers to the girls they are interested in, and he felt a desire to do the same, to send a bouquet to Miss Morgenstern.

Still, in spite of the training and coaching Miss Morgenstern had given him in worldly ways in general

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and in American ways in particular, Selz felt rather awkward as he walked up to the flower vender and ordered a bouquet. If he were not ashamed he would ask the boy what was the best and nicest way of despatching the bouquet to its destination. Then he thought that in the office he might learn this from the girl stenographer. The stenographer had often been his good angel and advised him in matters pertaining to propriety and etiquette. But this, upon a second thought, seemed like taking her too much into his confidence. So he took the bouquet with him into his little workroom, mused for a few moments, and then decided to send it to Miss Morgenstern with one of the little boys who were working in the shop. He called the foreman.

"Have you a boy around whom you could spare for a few hours?" he asked. "I want to send him on an errand."

The foreman recalled that he had taken in a youngster the other day at the request of a woman who was working there as a finisher. The boy had not yet been put to any specific work, as he had taken him in more in response to the pleadings of his mother, who wanted to have her son near her, than because he actually needed just such a boy about the shop. A minute later the foreman opened the door to Selz's room and pushed in the figure of a child. The little boy, half scared, half astonished, remained near the door motionless.

"Come here," Selz nodded to him, his voice still reverberating the happiness and satisfaction which the cordiality of Mr. Morgenstern instilled in it during the lunch hour. "Come here; don't be afraid."

The little boy moved up cautiously and stood between Selz and the window, his lean figure and pale, young-old face coming into instant and full view.

"Where have I seen him?" flashed through Selz's mind. He gave the boy another and more prolonged look and was still more convinced that he had seen that face before, seen it under peculiar circumstances.

He tried to recollect the places where he once roomed when he was still an operator and lived on the East Side. Perhaps the boy was the son of one of his former landladies. But he could not place him. Then he thought that perhaps he had once worked together with the father or brother of the lad. Then it occurred to him—and at this thought his face became flushed with excitement—that the boy might be the son of a dear friend, and perhaps a relative of his from the Old World.

"Where do you live?" asked Selz.

"On Pitt Street," the boy replied, looking at his interrogator with awe, for he felt much the same as if he were being questioned by an official, a *Russian* official. He knew he was in the presence of the boss, his boss, his mother's boss. His voice convinced Selz all the more that this boy was a relative of his. He was certain he had heard that voice often before.

"How long have you lived there?" Selz continued, looking still closer into the child's face.

"Six months, ever since we—my mother and I—came to this country," the boy answered haltingly.

"Where did you come from?" Selz asked, slowly, his voice strung to the highest point of expectation.

"From Yanovo," the little boy replied, looking with

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eyes full of wonder at the man who was questioning him.

"What was it you said?" asked Selz eagerly, a sudden burst of joy lighting up his face.

"Yanovo," the child repeated.

Selz began to rub his hands in satisfaction. "Yanovo," he repeated. That name sounded so dear to him. It was the town where he was born and had lived until he left for America.

"What is your father's name?" Selz asked, nervously himself for the final triumph.

But the child's face suddenly became blank and he seemed to find no words.

"What is—your name?" Selz persisted as gently as he could, seeing that the boy was becoming confused under the rapid fire of questions. "What is your name?"

"Max my name is here. At home they called me Mordecai. Max Salzman my name is," the boy answered slowly.

"What?" Selz groaned and gripped the table. The boy looked at him in amazement, ready to burst into tears from fright. "What was your name, you said?" Selz repeated, gaining control over himself.

"Mordecai Salzman," the boy again stammered forth.

Selz rose, walked up to the window, and stood there pounding upon the pane with his fingers for a few minutes. When he took his seat again his eyes were covered with a mist and his voice was husky.

"And you have been here six months?" he asked softly.

“Yes.”

“And your mother came with you six months ago?”

“Yes.”

“And what is your mother’s name?” Selz asked, tightening his grip upon the table.

“Sarah,” the boy answered, looking Selz straight in the face, for Selz’s soft voice had somehow disarmed all fear.

“And where is she now?” Selz went on, almost in a whisper.

“In the shop,” Max answered. “She is that tall woman in the corner, the finisher.”

Selz wheeled around in his chair and fumbled among the papers in his desk for some time. When he turned his face toward the boy again it was ashen. He told little Max to wait there for a while and he walked into the shop.

The firm of Birnbaum, Weiss and Selz was employing some three hundred men and women. But it did not take Selz more than an instant to distinguish that particular finisher at the other end of the room. Yes, it was Sarah, his Sarah. And she looked every bit of the thirty-three years she was. But she was still the same handsome, the same winning Sarah. He studied her face for a moment. There was a sad but a dignified look in it.

Just then Sarah rose and walked a few paces to get a new bundle of coats and Selz could see her tall figure, garbed in a simple black dress, as erect and stately as she was the day he had left her. Before she sat down to work again, Sarah surveyed the room with a sweeping glance. For a moment her eyes rested on

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Selz, but there was not the slightest sign of recognition in them. This time she looked to Selz not only sad and dignified, but stern, relentless, as if she came there to sit in judgment over the world and its wrongs and injustices.

Then the picture of Miss Morgenstern flashed through his mind, the image of the short, plump Miss Morgenstern, who must have been all of thirty-five, but who looked like a big, overgrown and helpless baby, constantly toying with her diamonds and rings. And he wondered how he could let himself be dazzled by her jewels, by her coarse, conceited father, and by her mother, who had no more breeding than a fish-woman.

As he looked at Sarah's face, in which there were lines of suffering, signs of cruel pangs, of sleepless nights, but in which there still showed beauty and intelligence, understanding and independence, he felt a sort of disgust for Miss Morgenstern and for himself.

The foreman, perceiving one of the proprietors standing in the shop as if looking for something, or some one, was coming toward him. Selz was about to ask him how long the new finisher had been working there, but changed his mind and walked into the office.

Little Max had by this time completely gotten over his fear and was studying the pictures in the fashion book which lay on the table. Mr. Selz gazed at him fondly for an instant and felt a burning desire to take this little fellow, whom he knew now to be his son, the son he had not seen for seven years, and clasp him in his arms. Then an idea came to his mind. He

calmed himself as best he could and took his seat at the desk.

"And now, Max," he said, motioning to the youngster, "come here and tell me all about yourself—your father—"

There was something in his voice which made little Max feel perfectly at home with him, but at the mention of the word "father" he became embarrassed once more. He did not stir from his place at the table. Selz moved up closer to him, put his hand upon his shoulder and asked:

"What is your father doing, Max—where is he?"

The boy looked at him with eyes full of misery. The haunted look which he had when the foreman first pushed him into that room came back to his eyes.

"You don't know where your father is?" He took the initiative, his voice growing still softer.

The boy nodded his head affirmatively.

"He left you—your mother, and you don't know where he is?"

Again the child nodded, tears gathering in his eyes.

"You hate your father—don't you?" Selz continued still fainter. "He is a mean man, is he not,—a mean man?"

This was the last straw. Max fairly jumped from his seat. He was trembling with rage. A stream of tears burst from his eyes which were flashing fire at the big man, the "boss" who sat opposite him.

"He is not," he sobbed defiantly. "He is a good man. Mother always said so. He is a good man, *a good man.*"

The paroxysm of tears loosened the boy's tongue.

A few minutes later Selz and little Max were again sitting opposite each other and little Max was telling him confidentially all about Yanovo, how gloomy it was getting to be there without letters from his father, how he would awake nights and find his mother weeping and her pillow wet with tears. The people, too, their neighbors, were adding fuel to the fire which was consuming his mother by pitying her and saying harsh things about his father for not writing to them. But his mother always warned him not to listen to those people. His father, she said, was a good man, a very, very good man. He was busy there and worried trying to make a place for himself and for them in the New World and that was why he was not writing. And maybe he was sick—the intense struggle in a strange land may have broken down his health, and so he could not write. . . . But he would write, he would—some day. He would come to them or would send for them—he surely would. The people were all wrong. His father was good and kind—always kind.

Then, last fall, when the rains began and people in the village were settling down for the winter with its long,—oh, such dreadfully long nights, and such short days,—a strange restlessness took hold of his mother. She would sit among people and not hear what they were saying; she would look at you and yet she would not see you, nor recognize you. Her face aged daily—hourly—until one night she arose at midnight and lighted the kerosene lamp, and sat there by the window peering out into the dark, and weeping softly, quietly all to herself. Then fear seized him and he be-

gan to cry and she took him in her lap and kissed him, kissed him and told him that they were going in a few days, in a very few days, to America to search for his father. She could not stand another winter there, she said. She could bear those long nights no longer ; they would drive her crazy. And so they sat awaiting the dawn.

Then when the day broke she went out into the street and her face seemed to have grown younger and she looked so content and happy. Before noon of that same day she had sold her little store, and the next morning a little peasant cart drove up to their house and, amid the tears and blessings of their townspeople, they started for the railway station, thirty miles away, which was to take them to America and to New York.

She worked at first in a little shop on the East Side. Now she had been working here for two weeks, and since the foreman granted her request and took him into the shop so that he was near her all day, his mother was happy again, happier than she had been in a long time. She did not cry nights so much now. She was so tired.

Selz looked at little Max, who was breathing hard and on whose forehead stood big drops of perspiration from the excitement into which the recital of his story had thrown him. By turns the little boy's face looked young and old, submissive and defiant, crushed and haughty. Above all, however, Selz saw in his face something, an unmistakable "something," which the sleepless nights, and tears, and suffering of the last three years had chiseled there. He wondered whether

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these lines would ever be smoothed out, whether those dreadful years would ever be erased from his son's memory.

"And here," Selz said, breaking the silence which was becoming awkward, "here you have not yet heard of your father, you have not yet found him?"

"No," said Max, "but we will find him. I am sure we will." His face brightened. "We look for him every evening. Our friends—we have many friends here—are looking for him, and when they see him they will tell him that we are here and then he will come to us. He might come any day now. At night I often lie awake and listen maybe father would come knocking at the door, maybe he had already learned about us and is coming to look for us. Many times during the night I wake up and listen and then mother kisses me and cries until I fall asleep—"

Without exactly knowing what he was doing, Selz drew the boy closer to him and passed his hand over his head several times. The silent caresses of the stranger for a moment spread a peculiar softness and tenderness over the face of the child. Then, as if impelled by some invisible signal, Max swiftly erected himself, looked Selz straight in the face with a pair of sharp, searching, young-old eyes and asked:

"Why—do you—perhaps—know my father?"

Selz sank deeper in the chair for an instant and then replied in a dull, hoarse voice:

"No-o, but—I—will help you look for him."

Fearing another such question, however, Selz rose, opened the window and breathed long and deep. Then on learning that little Max had his place at almost the

very opposite end of the shop from where his mother sat, he told him to go back to work, as he no longer had any need to send him anywhere. The bouquet, which lay there wrapped in a paper, he threw into the waste basket and, taking his coat and hat, he walked out into the street.

More than once during the rest of that afternoon the figure of Miss Morgenstern, the lasting enmity of her father, the wizard in the garment world, and possible business difficulties as a result of his severing his relations with Miss Morgenstern, flitted through Selz's mind. Every time, however, these thoughts were swallowed up by the picture of Sarah and little Max sitting by the window in the murky light of the kerosene lamp, awaiting the dawn so that they might go to America in search of father, in search of him—!

At a quarter of six Selz was again in his workroom. He called the foreman and told him to send in the new finisher when she got through working at six o'clock.

"Only," he said, looking out of the window, "don't scare her. Tell her so she won't be frightened."

In spite of the foreman's suavity, however, Sarah became terror-stricken when she was told that the boss wanted to see her. She saw herself looking for another job. She would surely be discharged or else they would discharge her son. She told Max, who ran up to her, eager to tell her the happenings of the afternoon in the boss's office, to wait for her in the shop, and she followed the foreman into the office.

As the foreman closed the door behind her, she advanced a few steps toward Selz, who stood with his back to her looking out of the window. Then she re-

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mained in the middle of the room, uncertain as to what she was to do.

Selz turned around quickly, gazed at her whitened face for an instant and called weakly:

“Sarah, Sarah.”

She gave a wild start. Every muscle in her body seemed to have become paralyzed for a moment. She looked at him with a face of stone. When Wolf Salzman left Russia he was a slim, bearded young man. Victor Selz, the man who stood before her now, was smooth-shaven and inclined to corpulency.

“Sarah,” he murmured once more, advancing toward her with open arms. But Sarah sank dumbly into a chair near the table.

“Wolf,” she muttered, “Wolf—how could you—how could you—for three years—”

Selz put his arm about her and kissed her. Sarah did not protest, but her lips were cold and her face retained that same stony expression. Selz’s heart sank within him.

“Sarah,” he stammered, “can’t you forgive? Don’t look this way. Better weep—wring your hands—tear my eyes out, Sarah, but don’t look this way. Sarah—Sarah!”

Finally Sarah looked up at him, saw his pained, agonized look and her own eyes lost their glassy stare. They began to shine with tears, her face relaxed. A moment later they were in each other’s arms.

Sarah was the first to come to herself and she said, smiling through her tears:

“He is waiting.”

With one hand around her waist, Selz led her to the

door and opened it wide. Max walked in. Selz and Sarah were watching the startled expression in his face with dim eyes.

Max looked up from his mother to Selz, from Selz to his mother and then:

“A-are you—my f-father?”

But Selz seized him and clasped him in his arms.

“My son, my son—”

## MOTH-MULLEIN \*

*Mary Lisenard Cooper*

THE sky at that early hour was thin white and blue, faint with mist at the horizon. There was mist too on the low meadows, rising with the scent of hay and of ripe corn. With this thinness of light and sweetness of ripe summer there was a sense of completion in the morning. Something was finished. The deep trees by meadows and the road were darker, bluer green than in June. Above the mist and above the meadows, where pastures lay among the woods of the hills, it was already a dry and flaming tan that the sun brightened. The white road leading between fields and to those high pastures looked cool and almost soft with its fine dust—a road to follow quietly toward that climb.

From the garden path two people turned to the road. A farmer was coming their way in a red milk cart, an old man, wide face ruddy, and far-sighted eyes a washed blue like his clothes. He leaned forward, straining even his eyes a little, in the attitude of one about to make appropriate inquiries after health.

The gray, worn man with Cynthia spoke. "We'll go by the lane, my dear." His voice was low but a little

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thin, and the words came quickly, all on one note.

“Yes, father.”

As Cynthia watched him for a moment her long eyebrows were raised ever so slightly. He laughed a little, looking at the smoothness of her forehead and the clear edges of her lips.

“No, going by the lane won’t be too hard for me. At school you’ll go walking in a great procession with thousands of girls to talk to and you won’t have to charge off into lanes.”

He was talking too fast and unimportantly.

“What shall I say to girls?” she asked. “Will they care about our haymaking and our corn and our apples? And do girls like old tan books with deep footnotes about Roman wines?”

“I suppose with girls at seventeen you’ll talk about God and friendship and dancing-lessons and how to arrange this.”

He ran a hand over her thick light hair. She felt the thinness of the hand and its smooth heat too great even for that morning. The corners of her mouth deepened, and above long blue eyes the eyebrows almost met. Then after a small movement of her head the frown ceased.

“Well, of course, I shall love talking about my hair if there isn’t—if it matters.”

In the lane there were only long grass and wild roses. Over these the trees met. The light was made as much of shadow and mist as sun. In that air the man’s face was gray and blurred, lined, and folded too deeply for its gauntness.

His daughter looked suddenly away from him. She

reached down at her side for a handful of the roses, her eyes on the path ahead. There was a little cry and she glanced at her hand.

"I'm so sorry," said Mr. Lovellow.

"It's not anything. Only half a dozen thorns. Not half so bad as the first day of gardening." She looked up at him with again the slight raising of her brows.

"It is curious," he said, "to find wild roses so late in the summer." His voice was gentle and distant, not meant, you would have said, to reach farther than across a study.

"Yes," she said quickly. "There is something strange about it. They seem unreal here just now."

A few rose petals had fallen, speared on the fine blades of grass. He knocked them off with a jerk of his narrow stick. It was a long unpeeled piece of mountain ash, carved about for nearly all its length with tiny rings: there seemed hardly room for another notch. Cynthia glanced at it.

"So many walks!"

"Yes, good ones. It's time you had a stick, my dear, elderly as you're getting. Mind you make the notches fine and start high."

"I expect at school it would be odd to have a stick. I never saw a girl with one."

"But when, for that matter, have you ever seen a girl at all? I mean a real one such as you'll know, a girl with lovely indoor color and a trick of doing her hair low, and a high sweet voice and a way of copying quotations? With that sort you can, you know, do anything if you tell them I'm—about your father's writing."

She laughed at him, looking up and taking his arm.  
“I mean, you know, to make you the excuse for all my faults—carrying sticks or sunburn or anything else.”

They had come now almost to the end of the lane, to the end of being held back by clinging long grass and longer sprays of roses. Already there was a new sense, for all the quiet, of the brook not far away, making silence calmer, of a swift deep brook that rounded a mountain at the foot with one wide curve.

Presently the line of willows showed where the creek lay, and the lane stopped. Over the brook there was for a bridge only a single log, high above the stream, which cast on the dark water a blacker reflection. Cynthia looked at it and then at her father with rather wide eyes.

“You’re not afraid?” he said. “You weren’t afraid when you were four.”

“I am afraid.”

He kissed her between the wideness of her eyes.

“And I have been thinking you were so young! What a very grown-up thing to be afraid of crossing brooks.” He was laughing at her. Her lips were white. She stepped with a strained stiff motion upon the log and went across before him.

“Silly of me to be afraid,” she said.

“You mustn’t be again.”

Once on the mountain in the birches the light was clear and shifting, reflected from the high green of fine forest grasses and the bright gray of lichens. It was a light like sea water, just so other-worldly and so trans-

forming: it made for languor and the slowest sort of movement through its floating clarity. Cynthia walked very near her father.

"Let's get out of this," she said. "I don't—it's like Lyonnesse—something lost and enchanted."

"You're not scared again? Lyonnesse isn't a thing to be afraid of. I've always meant to add my scrap to the poems about it—a very nice place, I'm sure, where they drink only *crème de menthe* and eat mint jelly from the tips of silver spoons. Who'd mind being enchanted there?"

Cynthia was silent. Then, "Well, I'm not afraid now. The thing's not a sea-monster, only lichen; but I don't mind saying I'm glad to see the wall."

For all the smoothing of the winters and the vines, the stone wall at the end of the woods and the edge of the pasture was a rough breaking-off of the liquid lights of the wood.

With a sort of released vigor they stepped past it into the open. In that wide space the heat came sweet and golden, wet from the green lowlands and burnt from the pale sky. Half the heat was the scent of ripe corn and crops and the sweet fern of the wood's edge and the sunned grass of the pasture. Cynthia turned about slowly to the light, arms flung back.

"This is a good place," she said.

"The moths seem to think so," said Mr. Lovellow.

For the clearing was full of high stalks of moth-mullein, thick-furred dull leaves with wide yellow flowers; and the air about them was in motion with tiny white moth-wings, thinner than the blossoms; but beating, quivering, fainting to be near them as if the

flowers meant breath, meant life to white-winged moths.

"Do you suppose it's called moth-mullein because they love it so?" said Cynthia. "It's not fluttery and fine like them." She leaned over to a great stalk. "But it has a little scent, a very frail fragrance."

She dropped upon the grass beside her father.

"You might look it up in that seventeenth-century Dictionary of Arts and Sciences we found," he said. "It's often rather pretty on such matters."

"Then I will."

"But now—I wonder if we could hear their wings if we're still enough."

The moths came near to hanging without motion in the light. For a while it was quiet on the hill.

Cynthia reached out a brown hand to her father's.

"What a great fist you have!" he said. "I've brought you up very badly with gardening and apple-picking."

She brushed her cheek against his hand. He looked at her bent head and then across the valley. His face was deeper lined, not even blurred now, but sharp, gray and white, more than ever folded too deeply for its gauntness. There was quiet on the hill again.

Across the valley came the antiphonal faint chimes of the two churches and then the slow clear tolling for eleven.

"I like the courtesy of those two bells," he said. "They never ring together and one misses either without the other. I suppose they mean it's eleven, though, and we must go."

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Cynthia's eyes were very wide. "This is such a good place."

His voice was cool and his words were clipped. "The bells have stopped ringing and we must hurry if the doctor is to take me to the hospital at twelve."

The woods now seemed chilled, more than ever like sea water to close overhead a last time; going down through them was as fast as diving, and as helpless once you started.

"The moths don't like this either," said Cynthia. "You notice they stay in the sun. They stay where the flower is."

"We'll go back through the village," said Mr. Lovellow, at the foot of the mountain. Again there was the slight raising of Cynthia's long brows. Her father smiled. "The street is interesting with everyone in church. And I should like to hear the murmurs of divine service as we pass."

The path to the village along the brook was brief beneath low willows. Mr. Lovellow talked very fast in his distant voice. Cynthia answered with her little smile and her quick questions. At the end of the path, where the village street began, the talking stopped, as if the street were charmed like the wood. In shadows of deep trees and heat fading the shadows, the white houses were freshly ancient, lovely shells of dwellings from which all life had passed; the frail music of a hymn came from the slender church: thin voices of old ladies did their best to belie the dying of the town. Cynthia's hand was on her father's arm, close and firm. His coat was too loose upon his arm and she

felt the straight hot thinness through the cloth.

"Poor dears," she said. "Let's shout a lusty folksong for them."

Mr. Lovellow smiled. "You're so sure, then, that would fit the flavor of this countryside better than hymns on immortality?"

"Who but you should know the flavor of this countryside? Whoever wrote about a thing or loved it half so well? I won't argue there, dear."

"You must begin, you know, to argue everywhere; when—when you're at school you'll have to."

Her lips were white as when she crossed the brook. She smiled. "I shall learn to argue."

Now that they were past the center of the village the houses were standing farther apart, less frail; built wider and set in richer gardens. Their own was the last before the open country. It was sturdily built with weathered wide gray shingles and lay low and long, the flaming garden on one side.

Their feet were nearly noiseless on the old bricks of the garden walk.

"Why haven't we ever planted thyme in the cracks?" said Mr. Lovellow.

"Thyme that hath so sweet a savor?" Oh, it must be planted there. Mint wouldn't grow where it's so dry, would it?"

A long stalk of hollyhock had fallen across their path. He leaned over and lifted it gently back among the others. His bending was steady at first but broke quickly into a jerk.

"It seems to me I've never seen it grow so high," he said.

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At the threshold he stopped to look at his watch before entering the shadows of the hall.

"It's nearly time for me to go. I'd better get my bag."

"I'll wait here, dear," said Cynthia. She sat on the warm step at the head of the path, where the row of flowers ended; she sat stiff and erect with her hands flat at her sides, almost clumsy and still with the stillness of an archaic statue: that dulled and permanent dark stillness. The high sun was shining sharply in her eyes and on her head, but she looked past the walk and the flowers, beyond meadows and lower hills to the bright tan of the upland pasture where moth-mullein grew. Her uneven breathing was short and deep, the nostrils faintly indented.

The noise of the doctor's car came from the distance. Cynthia lifted her head with a quick movement. Her eyes closed slowly, lids quivering. There was a sound of her father's weighted steps in the hall. Rising swiftly, she met him at the door. He put an arm about her shoulders. She roughened her hair against his coat.

"I heard the car," he said. "I thought I'd be ready."

For a moment there was silence. Then he spoke again, his voice deeper and his words accented, swift.

"Cynthia, this has been a good morning, hasn't it?"

"The very best sort, darling."

"It's what, aside from you, I'm hating most to leave—to exchange for the hospital and for—what is to come after that. Will you promise me that afterwards you'll go when you can to that pasture? My

dear, you're not to cry." He was holding her stiff straight body close and looking into her wide dry eyes. "Cynthia, it's the sort of place and morning I should like to think of you caring for. You promise?" She bent her head, unable to look into his eyes, gray ones meant for calm, but now bright with illness. He let her go. "I know you do," he said. "I needn't have asked."

She looked up, lips white and straight, blue eyes blazing. "It's all right, Father: don't you worry, dear. I won't—cry."

The doctor had come, a dusty man with a brisk, tired voice.

"Good morning, Miss Cynthia. All ready, Mr. Lovellow? Splendid." He swung the suitcase into his car and fussed at length about placing it in the back.

"Are you sure everything was in your bag?" said Cynthia.

"Everything, darling. You've quite spoiled me with such beautiful care. I shall find even the most registered nurses clumsy. I expect there'll never have been anyone at your school quite so thoughtful and so wise and so fond. They'll love you."

She looked back and up at him, laughing a little, a laugh pitched too high for her low voice.

"Will they, my dear? I shall try to make them: but then they're probably more particular than you."

The doctor had placed the suitcase. Mr. Lovellow's hands were once more hot and thin on Cynthia's. "Father—!" she said.

"Darling—my dear Cynthia—" He was kissing her. "You're to like school—and study—and write better than I have."

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"I'll be very good."

He kissed her lightly a last time and left. From the car he turned and waved his hand, a small gesture. She smiled, the sun in her eyes.

When the car was out of sight, the road that had been cool and soft in the early morning was now a dried, drained white, hard and dull. Once the noise of the car had gone, there was the hot whirr of a locust. It quivered like the heat-waves above the road. Cynthia went very quickly into the house. At the door she stopped to look again across the heat-mist of the meadows to the bright pasture. Turning, she went stiffly from the shadowy hall into the coolness of the library. Stopping before a shelf she pulled down with a strange little movement a thick book with powdery calf binding and a fragrance of age about it. She rested it upon a desk and turned the clinging leaves quickly, as with some purpose, past many fine-flavored words—marigold—marzipane—mead—moth-mullein. The pages lay still and smooth beneath her fingers pressed on them to whiteness.

"It is called moth-mullein not because for fragility or brevity of life it is like those faint-heart creatures; but because, for the softness of its leaves and the sweetness of its tender flowers, moths are ever about it and delight to hover there."

Her hands fell away from the book. She flung her arms across the pages and, shaking, sobbing beyond any help, she dropped her head upon her arms.

## TEDDY SAVES THE DAY \*

*Conrad Richter*

HEMINGWAY's blood boiled. It usually did when people said unkind things about J. W. Considine.

Lombardy people talked that way. And they talked that way because Considine had gone off to England and left his closed mansion an eyesore to the smart suburb of Lombardy. The windows were boarded up with unpainted lumber. The lawns had run wild with plumed grass and jungles of shrubbery.

When visitors raised an eyebrow and inquired why, if Lombardy was such a lovely place to live in, Considine did not live there, the prosperous Lombardy commuters just naturally blew up, and said what they thought about such a citizen.

Of all Lombardy, Hemingway was one of the few who completely approved of the Considine desertion. The rear windows of the modest Hemingway house peered out on the great overgrown grounds. And the latter, be it known, formed a fine place to walk with the Hemingway baby. There were secluded nooks among clumped evergreens, where Hemingway could fancy that he was in the North Woods; and there was a sunny niche or two along the great wall that reminded him of pictures of English estates.

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Hemingway was not the type of man who is spoken of enthusiastically as a "natural leader" or a "good fellow." One of his few devoted admirers was his baby—probably because he was devoted to it. After studio hours and on Sunday he could always be seen in its company.

Certain humorous folks dubbed him "Mrs. Hemingway's nurse." And because he preferred to stay at home with the baby, rather than run around to card parties and dances with his pretty young wife, some were unkind enough to say that he did not go out with her because she was ashamed of him.

Hemingway looked older than his wife, wore thick lenses, and while talking tried to hide his hands, which were stained with the chemicals he used in his work. He was a photographer, had been an engraver, and still cherished a defeated passion for fine art. Once each year he religiously pilgrimaged to New York, and spent a week haunting the galleries and exhibitions.

But his blood could boil like any other man's, and this morning it had reached that temperature.

A group of men stood at the roofed trolley station waiting for the eight-fifteen. Usually the male residents of Lombardy drove to their offices in regal solitude. But this summer there was a bad eight-mile detour on the road to town, and the entire commuting contingent was forced to accept the trolley.

The talk among the waiting group was of Considine, for a very good reason. The morning paper had carried the astonishing announcement that Miss Cordelia Considine had married a British lord.

"Well," philosophized Mr. Woodington Jones, vice-president of the Retailers' Gas Company, "that's what he went over there for, wasn't it?"

"I hope," sneered old Mr. Church, "his lordship never talks with his father-in-law on literature. Con-sidine made his millions in coal, you know. When his house was being built, the furnisher asked him what books he should buy for the library. 'Oh, some green ones and blue ones, but mostly red ones,' he said."

At the laugh that followed, Hemingway's cheeks warmed. It was not so much what was being said just now as the cumulative effect of all that had been said before. It was as though a benefactor and friend were being maligned within his hearing.

"I wonder," said immaculate Richmond Hall, the transit company attorney, "how that daughter of his ever hooked a lord. Mrs. Hall says she was a homely kid; and she had a mean disposition, too."

"She took after her old man," observed Jones. "They say he let that place of his here go to seed just to spite Lombardy—because people didn't make more fuss over him."

Hemingway gave a start as if he had been pushed. Abandon the noble lines of that house, desert the pleasant nooks of that screened yard—for spite!

"If people say that, they lie!" a voice declared; and Hemingway gave another start as he recognized it as his own.

The little group of heads turned in his direction; and as the speaker's identity was recognized a smile appeared on several faces.

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"Did I hear a baby lisp?" blandly inquired Woodington Jones.

It caused a laugh, and that was fortunate for Hemingway. The laugh revived in him some of his recent state of indignation. When the laugh had subsided, Jones fixed his eyes on the lean photographer owlishly.

"You have legal grounds for such a remark, I suppose?"

Hemingway realized at once that he had no grounds at all—unless it might be the Considine grounds themselves, which gave him a bond of sympathy for its owner. Of course he could not mention this. It would weaken rather than support his case. But to defend his absent neighbor he would have to say more than that he simply "didn't believe it."

"Yes," he stammered, paling a trifle. "I have—legal grounds for such remarks."

Words are sometimes as effective as weapons. Despite the unfavorable tone in which they were uttered, Hemingway felt that he had created an effect similar to that of pulling out a small revolver.

"And they are what?" inquired Woodington Jones.

"They are—" Hemingway hesitated. He would have to think quickly of something. "They are—" But he could bring nothing to mind. "They are—my intimate knowledge of Mr. Considine."

"Your intimate knowledge! And pray what is that?"

"Nothing much," said Hemingway, breathing rather fast and now blindly seizing the first thing that came to mind. "Nothing, except that I happen to meet Mr.

Considine once a year, when he is in New York for the express purpose of having me visit him at his hotel and take his picture."

It was a wild fabrication, made on the moment out of his desperate imagination. He regretted it as soon as it was out; and when there was no reply from the somewhat surprised Woodington Jones, he hastened to modify his extravagant statement.

"I don't say that to blow my horn. Mr. Considine probably could . . . find men in England or New York . . . better able to take his portrait than I am. I simply said it to show that—that I know Walter Considine—and the man who says unpleasant things about him doesn't know what he's talking about." He uttered the last sentence with a bit of fierce satisfaction for which he was instantly sorry. There was no reply from Woodington Jones nor from his companions. A few moments of awkward silence followed, and Hemingway was mightily relieved when the situation was dissolved by the noisy arrival of the car.

Usually Hemingway remained in the background and boarded the steps last. But to-day, to his surprise, several of the group stepped courteously back to let him pass. He was too disconcerted to protest, and this state of emotion increased when Barret Whiteman, the banker, sat down beside him.

"I've got a morning paper here," remarked Whiteman fraternally. "All I want is the business section. You are welcome to the rest."

Hemingway accepted it with stammered thanks.

He told himself that this show of attention had just been a lucky accident. But that evening on the five-

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o'clock car, it was Woodington Jones himself who squeezed his big bulk into the seat with Hemingway, and said he hoped the latter hadn't taken offense at what he, Jones, had said about Hemingway's friend, Mr. Considine. Exaggerations and rumors do happen along, and this had doubtless been one of them. Hemingway had a most pleasant talk; and as he got off the car at the station, more than one "Good night, Hemingway!" floated after him.

He walked home, conscious of an uneasy, almost guilty frame of mind. Certainly, he would say no more about his fabricated relationship to J. W. Considine. It might sometime prove embarrassing. Above all, he would keep the matter from his wife.

Several evenings afterward, Anne met him at the door with just a little more warmth than usual; and as he entered the hall he became aware of a heavenly aroma in the air.

"Dinner's on the table and done spiling," she announced cheerfully. It was one of his own homely sayings.

"I thought you wanted me to keep Ted while you and Harriet went in to the movies!"

"Oh, bother the movies to-night!" she said magnanimously. "Hurry and wash your hands, dear."

When he came into the dining-room, he found the table had a new cloth, and the vase in the center a fresh bouquet of pink rambler roses. At about the same moment Anne's sister Harriet, who made her home with them, appeared from the kitchen, beaming and bearing a platter of beefsteak done his mother's "long way."

At the table Anne and Harriet both paid him unusual attention. They entertained him with intimate morsels of friendly gossip, which few men repeat but which most men in the privacy of their own homes enjoy hearing. After his favorite dessert, prune soufflé, they suggested that they really would enjoy the fragrance of his cigar. In deep peace Hemingway leaned back in his chair.

After a little, he observed an admiring yet triumphant gleam in his wife's eyes.

"So that," she smiled, "is why you go to New York every summer, Bert!"

The peaceful blue smoke ceased emanating.

"Why—what do you mean?"

"Bert," she reproved gently, "why didn't you tell us you knew Mr. Considine?"

Albert Hemingway realized abruptly that his prevarication had come home to roost. His wife went on, in pretty contrition:

"I recall now that I wasn't always interested in your talk about shop. But I didn't mean that we wouldn't be interested to hear about Mr. Considine! When Mrs. Sidney White asked Harriet and me about it, we were thunderstruck to realize that we didn't even know. Of course, we didn't tell *her* we didn't. But it was very humiliating, and taught me never to reproach you again for talking about business."

Hemingway was silent.

"Albert," suggested Harriet, "Anne and I are just dying to hear about how you and Mr. Considine met."

"And Cordelia, the one who married the lord, did you ever take her picture?" asked his wife.

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"No! Gosh, no!" floundered Hemingway. "I—never met her. I never even saw her."

"But you knew Mr. Considine so well!" persisted his wife.

"Hardly that, Anne," stammered her perspiring husband. "I wouldn't say, his friend. I was just his photographer."

"You were more than that," declared Anne; "if Mr. Considine came over to New York to have you take his photograph."

"You know, Harriet," pursued Mrs. Hemingway thoughtfully, "we really should get a new rug for the living-room. It isn't fit for Mr. Considine to see."

Hemingway laughed nervously. "Not much chance of Considine ever coming back to Lombardy, Anne."

"Why, don't you know!" His wife gazed at him in an astonishment that vaguely alarmed him. Her expression changed to anticipatory radiance. "You will be delighted, Bert! Mr. Considine is coming to Lombardy for the rest of the summer!"

Hemingway half rose from his chair.

"N-not here!"

"Why, certainly—why not! The men were at work to-day taking down the boards from the windows."

At that moment the telephone rang. It was for Anne. For some minutes she chatted with high animation, and when she returned to the dining-room her face was aglow.

"I have the honor, Mr. Famous Man, to announce your invitation to the Lawrence McIlwains next week Tuesday for dinner. I just had the loveliest chat with Mrs. McIlwain. Her husband is one of the few men

who knew Mr. Considine personally when he lived here; and they are going to give him a dinner to welcome him back. The Judge Bolands and Sidney Whites are to be there. It was probably Mrs. White who told her about you. Anyhow, Harriet and I are to be sure to bring you along."

"But—Teddy!" protested Hemingway, paling. "I will have to stay with him."

"Now don't you fret about Teddy," assured his wife. "We will get Mrs. Trout here to take care of him."

"Anne," brilliantly announced Harriet, "Albert has no white flannel trousers. He simply must buy a pair before Tuesday night a week."

"I—Oh, Lord!" groaned Hemingway. "I can't talk about trousers now. I mean I've got a terrific headache. I guess I ate too much. If you folks'll excuse me, I think I'll lie down a little."

The succession of balmy sunny days that followed seemed to Albert Hemingway like a lurid nightmare peopled with the plagues from purgatory. Never had he conceived that such a mild, innocent object of art as the calendar could assume the rôle of a dread instrument relegating him to eternal damnation. Why, instead of the live and kicking J. W. Considine, had he not picked some dead celebrity, like Grover Cleveland, who could not possibly return from the grave to confound him!

By Friday morning, he had threshed the matter over a million times and had come to the inexorable conclusion that there was no escape. There was one slim chance of a lighter penalty: That was to go to Mr.

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Considine on his hands and knees when the great man arrived, confess the whole wretched story, and ask for forgiveness. It would be hard, harder than walking barefoot over glass. But anything was preferable to being humiliated in front of Anne and Harriet, in front of Woodington Jones, Barret Whiteman, and others with whom he rode the morning trolley. Considine was due to arrive Saturday night. He would call on Sunday.

Friday afternoon Anne telephoned to the studio that he had better come home. For the moment his heart quailed.

"Mr. Considine—he hasn't come yet, Anne?"

"Oh, no, dear! Not till to-morrow. But something is the matter with Ted. He has cried all afternoon. Harriet and I are at our wit's end. Perhaps you can do something with him."

Hemingway said he would be home at once. Some time later he descended from the four-thirty car at the Lombardy station. As he approached his house, he stopped and listened with a puzzled face. That couldn't possibly be Teddy! The child never had screamed like that in his life.

Thoroughly frightened, Hemingway burst into the middle bedroom, where six-months-old Teddy held out tiny arms to him above a swollen, tear-stained face. With a sensation under his waistcoat that all the chemists in the world can't produce, Hemingway caught up the youngster in his arms.

"Maybe he'll stop now," he said confidently. "You and Harriet better get some rest. You look pretty nearly worn out."

Left alone, Hemingway walked up and down the room, rocking the child in his arms as he went. After a half-hour, he thought he would try sitting down, but instantly there was a warning protest from Teddy. Hemingway rose hastily and continued his peregrination until, finally, Anne appeared in the doorway.

"Don't you think you can put him down?" she whispered. "He simply must be sleepy. He hasn't had a wink since before noon."

"I can try it," Hemingway replied in the lip language. He peered down at the bundle of young life in his arms. A pair of blue eyes wider awake than ever gazed back at him. "But it won't do any good," he added aloud. A sudden movement in his arms arrested his attention. Glancing down, he perceived Teddy's face reddening as if in strain. At the same moment the little knees dug violently into his vest, and from the trembling lips issued a wailing scream. "There's something radically wrong with this child!" he announced. "You take him, Anne. I'm going to call the doctor."

Twenty minutes later, at a moment when parental agitation had about reached the breaking point, the physician appeared.

"I heard him down at Ending Lane," he greeted them cheerfully. "Got a splendid pair of lungs, hasn't he?"

Hemingway nodded dumbly, both envying and resenting the professional *sang-froid*. The physician squinted into the miniature mouth, asked a question or two regarding the certainty of sterilized milk, remarked on the summer heat, condemned the condition

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of the Woodington Jones sidewalk up the street, inquired politely about the photography business, and left presently, with the unassuring reassurance that it was nothing to worry over ; just mash one of these tiny white pills and give it every half-hour in a spoonful of warm water.

The pills were administered at intervals correct to the minute, and before an hour elapsed the cries subsided. But the small patient showed no inclination for his crib ; and when Teddy finally dozed off in Hemingway's numb arms, it was morning.

That day, at the studio, Hemingway listened with haunting dread for the sound of the telephone bell. When noon came without a call from home, he felt much relieved. Thank goodness ! Teddy's tantrum had happened yesterday, and not to-night after Mr. Con-sidine's arrival ! He breathed easily all the way to Lombardy, in fact until he came down the home street and again heard Teddy's wails piercing the quiet Saturday afternoon. Anne had simply refrained from calling him. Now, fully aroused, he called the doctor to come at once.

The physician came, but not at once, remonstrated indulgently with them for their parental solicitude, and assured them that were this their third or fourth child, instead of their first, they would feel no cause for agitation or alarm.

"Doctor," inquired Hemingway earnestly, "you know Mrs. Hemingway changed the milk from pasteurized to certified. You thought it would make Teddy stronger. She gave the new order last week ; but it just

started to come through yesterday morning. Mightn't that have something to do with it?"'

"No," declared the doctor; "the new milk would be better for the child, I'd say; not worse. Personally, I believe he is merely the owner of a highly strung nervous system. Mother Nature herself will probably adjust the matter in six or eight months."

"Six or eight months!"'

"Twelve at the longest," assured the physician. "I've known perhaps a dozen infants to change their disposition like this. Beforehand they were no more trouble than a peach tree in the back yard. Afterward, you could hear them for two blocks. One mother, I remember, confided to me that she and her husband did not get two hours' uninterrupted sleep in nine months."

"But, Doctor—"

"No cause for agitation," promised the other blandly. "There's no better exercise known for a child's lungs."

"But other people need a little sleep!"'

"Well,"—the doctor looked grave—"that's in the game. One cannot expect to be a parent without cost."

"I—we—don't expect to," broke in Hemingway. "But the neighbors! They won't be able to sleep! They'll raise a row!"'

"I'd forget the neighbors," suggested the physician. "Every infant has the inalienable right to free expression. Your neighbors were cry-babies themselves once upon a time."

"But, Doctor Rorke!" remonstrated Anne. "What

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can we do when Mr. Considine moves into his house behind us! He is expected, you know, to-night."

"Well," said the physician, with a grimace, "I won't vouch for that gentleman. If everything's true I've heard about him, he's likely to talk a trifle warmly about you to the neighbors. But what should you care about that!" In good humor with himself and the world, he picked up his case and hat and cheerfully departed.

But there was no cheer in the Hemingway house that evening. About eight o'clock Harriet announced that several cars had run up the Considine drive, and that lights were being turned on all over the big house. To make things worse, the humidity had increased. It would be suffocating for anyone to try to sleep with closed windows. Teddy wailed piercingly through most of the still, hot night.

Before he dropped off to slumber, toward morning, Hemingway had begun to realize that he could not face Mr. Considine now. In his mind's eye, he saw the hectic flush spring into the noted millionaire's cheeks. "What! You're the father of the baby that kept me awake till morning!" . . . No, he would not dare ask for mercy at the hands of his neighbor now.

The next day was Sunday.

"You said you were going to call on your friend, Mr. Considine," reminded Anne.

"Not to-day," protested Hemingway. "I'm too worried over Teddy."

"You can't go to-night, you recall. We're all invited to dinner at Mrs. Wilson's."

"That's right," he said. "But you folks go. I'll stay with Teddy to-night."

He was rather relieved when the sisters departed. At the same time, standing in the middle bedroom with the squirming Teddy in his arms, he experienced a sense of desolation and disaster. Intermittently the baby rent the night with screams that might have been anger and might have been pain. Hemingway could translate the tone, but not the message.

It was hot up-stairs. The perspiration dripped from Hemingway's face. He found it a trifle cooler in the rear room, but here he was nearer to the Considines. Once, as he peered out of the window, he thought he glimpsed a tall, distinguished-looking figure pacing ominously up and down the dim Considine terrace.

Shortly before nine o'clock he was startled by a knock on the front screen door. With new apprehension, Hemingway laid the loudly unwilling Teddy in his crib and started down-stairs. On the bottom step he gulped with relief. The figure on the other side of the hooked screen door was not that of a tall, distinguished-looking millionaire.

The man was a newcomer to Lombardy. Hemingway had seen him on Magnolia Road that morning as he went to Shollenberger's Community Drug Store for his Sunday paper. There had been a Riggs, or Briggs, or some such name, who had recently moved into Magnolia Road. This was doubtless he. At the same time, Hemingway wondered how such an ordinary man had chanced to move to Lombardy. He was a little man, with pale, watery blue eyes and unobtrusive gray mustaches that reminded Hemingway of a walrus's tusks.

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"How-de-do," he nodded to Hemingway. "Plagued hot." He took off his hat and wiped his bald head with a silk handkerchief. "Can't stand hearing a baby cry. Gets my goat."

"I'm terribly sorry," offered Hemingway. "I didn't think you could hear him from your place."

"Hear her further than that," gurgled the other. "Nothing carries like a baby in the night time. Dropped in to see if I could do anything. Been a father myself. Know what it is."

"I certainly appreciate your kindness," said Hemingway; "but there's really nothing the matter with him much."

"There ain't, eh!" muttered the little man, blinking his watery blue eyes.

"Crying's natural to a baby," explained Hemingway. "It's the first thing they do when they're born. They don't laugh."

"They don't, eh?" nodded the other mildly. "Could I see her?"

"Certainly," said Hemingway, hesitating a moment. Then he unhooked the screen door. "If you don't mind coming up-stairs. The rooms are sort of torn up."

"Huh! Got to be pretty bad to scare me."

The visitor stumped energetically up the stairs, but once in the same room with Teddy, seemed greatly perturbed by the cries.

"She's got the colic!" at last he informed Hemingway.

"It sounds like it," agreed Hemingway politely; "but the doctor says it's the result of a high-strung, nervous system."

"She's got the colic," repeated the little man. "What kind of milk is she getting?"

"Cow's milk."

"What kind of cow?"

"I don't know; but it's certified."

"It's colic," said the little man.

"But the doctor—" insisted Hemingway.

"Some preachers make mistakes. Some bankers make mistakes. And some doctors make mistakes."

"But this doctor—"

"It's colic," said the little man patiently. "I can cure her. You can cure her. Anybody can. Just put more water to her milk till she doesn't holler. Easy as that!"

"We give now the proportion the doctor and Mrs. Hemingway's doctor book tells us," protested Hemingway.

"It's colic," said the little man. "That's what we gave our oldest girl. She hollered worse than this. We had to put in twice as much water as usual. Tasted like dishwater to me. Fixed her up, though. Other was too rich for her. Stomach too delicate. Never think it to see her eat five courses, and look for more, to-day."

"I see," said Hemingway perfunctorily, still skeptical, but reluctant to express it.

"Give her to me," said the little man.

As carefully as if handling a package of great auk's eggs, he accepted the tearful bundle and laid the wet face tenderly against his low collar, which was a size too large for him.

"Now you can get a hot-water bottle. Not too hot. Not too full."

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Hemingway felt dimly that he was being ordered around rather authoritatively in his own house; but he hurried down-stairs for the article in question. He returned from the gas range in a few minutes just a wee bit gratified that Teddy in the little man's arms seemed as unhappy as before.

"Much obliged," acknowledged the other. Deliberately appropriating a linen runner from the chiffonier, he wrapped it about the bottle, which he planted between his and the baby's stomachs. Then he continued to walk up and down the room.

In four or five minutes, Hemingway, who stood helplessly by, thought he detected a slight abatement in the cries. He was not mistaken. Gradually the wailing subsided. In twenty minutes it had ceased altogether. The little patient, exhausted by its travail, blinked gratefully once or twice into the watery blue eyes, caught the little man's cravat in one tight fist, closed its eyes, and pushed a thumb blindly between contented lips. Triumphantly the little man strutted up and down, crooning in a cracked voice meaningless words to a meaningless tune.

Hemingway offered to relieve him, but the other shook his head.

"You can hold her all week," he sang, adapting, with ludicrous effect, his spoken words to his preposterous tune. "Haven't rocked a baby for years. Youngest daughter hasn't got any yet. Oldest daughter won't let me. Won't even let me with 'em alone. Scared I'll spoil 'em. Might give 'em unsterilized candy. Might give 'em germs on a kiss."

But the energy of even little men has its limitations.

Within a half-hour the still sleeping Teddy was tucked away in his white crib.

"You want to get horse blanket safety pins," whispered the visitor hoarsely as they tiptoed together out of the room. "Can't get uncovered at night and catch cold."

Hemingway nodded appreciatively. He was beginning to feel a distinct warmth toward this self-appointed friend in distress. That Anne and Harriet might not approve of him he vaguely realized, but did not care. He, Hemingway, enjoyed the other's humble appearance, his shrill, cracked tones, his unrefined English and ignorance of conventions.

"Let's smoke one," suggested the little man, on the front porch. With the air of having performed a worthy deed, he chose the most comfortable chair and proffered a cigar from his vest pocket. It was partly crushed, probably from contact with Teddy, and Hemingway was distrustful until his first draft. Then he relaxed in his rocker. It was a treat from the gods.

The little man likewise relaxed in his chair, tilting it back and cocking up his feet bar-room fashion on the railing. An air of peace and comradeship pervaded the porch. It was as if the two had gone through battle together, emerged victorious, and now rested in a spirit of mutual understanding.

A trolley passed on the avenue; and a few minutes later there were quick steps on the walk. Two looming shapes mounted the dusky porch with a sweep of familiar perfume. Hemingway got to his feet. The little man remained sitting. Mrs. Hemingway did not see him in the darkness.

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"Is that you, Albert?" she queried. At the tone of her voice, he was instantly conscious that something had happened.

"You're home early," he offered lamely.

"I couldn't have stayed a minute longer," she informed him, "or Mrs. Woodington Jones and I would have had a fight."

Hemingway swallowed apprehensively, and glanced with nervous misgiving toward that particular spot on the porch where his companion sat invisible in the shadows.

"Bert," declared his wife, "do you know what that woman had the effrontery to hint! That you had never taken a photograph of Mr. Considine, and Mr. Considine had told him—"

"Anne!" faintly stammered her husband. "Let's talk about it afterward."

But his wife was too distracted to heed him.

"I was never so mortified in my life! Every woman there seemed to believe her. I told Harriet on the way home that if it were true I'd never be able to hold up my head in Lombardy again."

Hemingway retreated a step or two in the gloom. He knew he should say something, but he could think of nothing to say. The silence became more strained.

"Albert!" said Harriet, in a slow, incredulous voice. "You don't mean to imply that it *is* true, do you?"

There was no answer from the unhappy Albert.

"Bert!" exclaimed his wife.

Hemingway waited in the darkness as long as he

could stand it. Then he realized the storm had broken, and that all hope of shelter was lost.

"Yes," he said, almost savagely. "It's true. I lied. I lied so I could stick up for Considine. He wasn't getting a square deal. Everybody was jumping on him behind his back that morning his girl married a lord. I couldn't stand it. I always liked his grounds. I felt I sort of knew him, even if I didn't. I—"

There was an exclamation of mingled incredulity and horror from his wife. Her aroused hand fumbled inside the screen door for the switch. As the merciless light flooded the porch, her husband flinched, but not nearly so much as she at the sight of a little, common-looking man with walrus-tusk mustaches and a bald head, leaning back bar-room fashion with his feet on her porch railing.

"Excuse me, Anne," said Hemingway desperately. "This gentleman is a friend of mine. He stopped Teddy's crying to-night in about twenty minutes. He gave me the cure. And I'm sure it will cure him for good. Mrs. Hemingway, Mr. Riggs—or Briggs. He just moved last week into the McKay house on Magnolia Road."

The little man lowered his chair and got to his feet. For a moment he turned and gazed deeply at Hemingway, his watery blue eyes reading the tragedy and wretchedness behind the other's thick lenses. Then he bowed to the two sisters, who were regarding him a trifle stiffly from their vantage point at the screen door.

"Albert's kidding you," he said, "like I was kidding that fat fellow Jones this afternoon." He placed an arm affectionately around the coatless shoulders of

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the wondering Hemingway. "My name's Considine"—he coughed—"J. Walter Considine, an old friend of Albert's. I just moved back to my old house behind you here last night."

## HIS FATHER'S HOUSE \*

*Jay Gelzer*

Moms came down to see him off the night he left, wearing her old plaid raincoat because they hadn't been able to afford a cab, and outside it was raining hard. His father, Moms explained as they started out, tight-lipped as always in mentioning him, had sent only a ticket, knowing that nothing for extras would be accepted.

Beneath her unfashionable hat her blue eyes were full of tears, as they stood together in the narrow, green aisle of the sleeper. So full of tears that she could not at first read the numbers on the long row of green curtains, and was obliged to blink short-sightedly at them before she spied his own.

"There—number eight is yours, Kenneth! Kiss me good-by, and I'll go now. I'm not staying to see the train pull out."

As though he were for a moment fooled by that! Somewhere safely out of sight Moms would stand, a small, tense figure of misery, watching the long train slide out of the depot serpentwise as it carried him away from her upon their first separation. Instinctively he knew this and suffered in the knowledge;

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but without questioning her decision, as he had refrained from questioning her previous decision to send him to his father for the summer, Kenneth put up his face obediently, and their lips met.

Hers were cold and softly unsteady, and he had a hot rush of agony at the imminence of parting. Holding him away from her, his mother looked down at him as though afraid somehow that she might forget exactly how he looked before he came back again.

"You are so young!" she regretted wistfully.

"I'm—"

Moms smiled at his explosive protest. "I know," she conceded. "You're fourteen. But that's very young, after all, Laddie!"

She seemed curiously unsure of herself, hesitating as though on the point of telling him something and then deciding against it.

"Kenneth, *don't* let other people decide things for you. Always think them out for yourself. Particularly—" again the perceptible hesitation, "particularly about your father."

She left then, running down the aisle with an effect of flight, and all he could do was to climb into the upper berth where his brand-new suitcase awaited him, and crouch down numbly, glad of the shielding curtains.

Useless to remind himself that his absence would last only the length of the summer and that he had assured Moms so on the way to the depot in the voice which at moments of high emotion invariably threatened to betray him into humiliating falsetto.

"I'm coming back soon, Moms. You know that!"

Moms hadn't been entirely reassuring in her answer. "Your father has much more to offer you, Kenneth."

Sitting crosslegged in his berth, somberly he reviewed the events which had happened since his father's invitation had disrupted the even tenor of his life, until, with a steady tolling of its bell, the engine pulled out into the downpour of rain, and he had an immediate pang, thinking of Moms fighting her way back home through wind and rain alone.

The tolling of the bell stopped as the engine accelerated its speed. Lights flashed by outside. Behind the green curtains people were going to bed. Mechanically he began to undress. Presently composed himself upon the pillow, and although he had not expected to sleep, opened his eyes to find the porter good-naturedly shaking him.

"Folks mostly likes to get off at K.C. and walk, young Mister. Anyways you'll be wantin' some breakfast."

*Breakfast!* Incredulously he stared around the car, with its green curtains vanished behind shining red panels, and smiled sheepishly.

"I could eat!" he admitted shyly.

Except for the well-meant but embarrassing curiosity of his fellow passengers, he would have enjoyed his three days upon the train. The observation car. The dining-car. The few stations where the long train stopped, including the one where he saw his first Indians.

Impossible not to be interested in all these, in spite of the bad moments like the one when, taking a snap-

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shot of an obese Indian squaw, the beady black eyes vanished, and he saw Moms' blue ones, filled with tears, and was compelled to turn and walk abruptly away. But with the very first morning the persecution of his fellow passengers began:

“Are you alone, little boy?”

Although he *wasn't* little—at least, not very little—when his next suit was to have long pants!

Then, persisting in the face of his not very informative nod, “Where are you going?”

“To visit my father.”

A strangeness in his answer, he realized immediately, a something which betrayed the fact that he didn't *live* with his father. Round eyes of sympathy fixed upon him. He had a hot, intolerant feeling that his youth was making him a target for impolite curiosity.

More questions. “Poor little boy! Is your mother dead?”

“My mother put me on the train.”

He blundered there, letting out the fact that his father and mother didn't live together, and his questioners desisted, whispering among themselves behind his back and showing him a kindness they would scarcely have shown even to a boy traveling alone.

*That* meant that they were being sorry for him, and their being sorry meant that there was something to be sorry *for*. They knew, these people, that because his father and mother did not live together, he was somehow set apart from ordinary childhood.

Kansas. Colorado. Arizona. Green changing slowly

to desert drab. A different kind of landscape, something gaunt and bare and breath-taking. Sand lying in ripples like water waves. Cactus plant, ugly and distorted. Yucca palm, bearing snowy, spike-like blossoms. Occasionally the sun-bleached bones of cattle, reminding him of treasured stories of the desert.

At a snail's pace the train dragged its way across the continent. His eyes grew weary of desert glare and accustomed to the Mexican adobe huts beside the track. His thoughts leaped ahead to the prospective meeting with his father.

He didn't remember his father, except as a vague blur of a big, blond man swinging him aloft easily when he must have been all of six. In the seven years since then Moms had acquired a white feather over one temple, a quality to her smile suspiciously like that which comes only after tears, but he had not seen his father once.

His father . . . dubiously the boy tried to reconstruct him from a past his brain had been too young to hold, succeeding in determining but one thing definite. His father had hurt his mother. Knowing this, he could anticipate the coming meeting with curiosity, but not with tenderness.

The train crawled on through the desert. Wound tortuously in and out of a barren mountain range where the heat had an odd, unreal, shimmering quality, and abruptly dropped down into a beginning of green orchards where he had his first sight of oranges growing. Riverside . . .

A slow excitement began to stir within him. The

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porter came and, appropriating the suitcase, brushed him off and pocketed the fee Moms had told him to give at the end of the journey.

"Nex' stop, young Mister!" he informed unnecessarily.

Again his fellow passengers were concentrating their interest upon him. No doubt they meant to pile out into the vestibule when he got off, to see who would meet him.

They did. As he stepped down from the train and stood waiting self-consciously beside his suitcase, a sharp whisper drifted down from above.

"I want to see who's going to meet that little boy!"

Two figures advanced through the blur of confusion enshrouding him. One seized the suitcase. The other caught him firmly by the shoulders.

"Hello, son! Hardly knew you! Big for your age, aren't you?"

It was over, the meeting he had vaguely dreaded, and he was walking down the platform, his father's arm linked companionably through his own. Behind him the porter was audibly reassuring the people who had been curious about him.

"No need worryin' 'bout *that* boy, Ma'am: he's some rich man's son. See 'at car waitin'?"

A car *was* waiting. A handsome maroon and silver car, within it a lady so lovely that he was immediately all hands and feet and speechless tongue.

Her name, according to his father, was Paula, and there was an awkward pause of uncertainty when he was introduced.

"This, Kenneth, is—Paula."

A warning look from the lovely lady toward his father. She made room beside her, and he climbed in and sat, pressed deep into fawn-colored cushions, with his father on the other side of him, feeling, between the two, very small indeed.

A chauffeur tilted the suitcase up beside him. Climbed in, and immediately they were rolling away at a smart pace.

Fawn-colored, very soft cushions. A lovely lady, very kind. Rich perfume, very strong. Smart fittings, very expensive. Everything was superlative, and Kenneth gave a tiny sigh. Moms would have liked this!

Whenever they made a play of imagining how they would live if they could, Moms always said:

"A car with fawn-colored cushions, Kenneth! And lots of perfume, good perfume. When you are rich and famous, we'll have those at any rate!"

He'd always assured Moms that they would have; that they'd have everything, with the things she wanted first.

Somewhere in the depths of him a pain began to throb exquisitely as the car darted up a side drive and stopped before a house. Such a house! Even with his first glance he could tell that the house was as fine as the car.

A child came running around the side of the house as they stood waiting for the door to open, and stopped short with eager, questioning eyes upon Kenneth.

"My little boy!" murmured the lovely lady apologetically.

The door opened. The group surged within. There

was a perceptible moment of discomfort, and he was introduced to his younger brother.

Clasping a pudgy six-year-old hand in his, Kenneth let it go with a feeling of aversion, a redness springing out behind his ears. Of course he knew men sometimes had two wives. He wasn't such a baby as not to know that, now that he read the newspapers! But when it was his own father, and *Moms* was *Moms*?

Sick, he turned away, with nowhere to turn, and his father stood watching him with exactly the same smile *Moms* had sometimes—the kind of smile which has tears close behind.

"I'll take you upstairs, young fellow!" he said with a sort of forced heartiness.

Trying to be kind, as the people on the train had tried to be kind, and showing by the very trying that things weren't right for a boy whose father and mother didn't live together!

The lovely lady called his father back for a startled aside as the two began the ascent of polished stairs.

"Why, Owen—I don't believe anybody *told* him!"

"Certainly he wasn't told! That would be Helen's way: to let him judge for himself," his father returned shortly.

Instantly Kenneth remembered *Moms*' "Think things out for yourself."

*This* was what *Moms* had meant!

The room made ready for him had everything a boy might be interested in—a radio, boys' books, boxing-gloves, even a set of fencing-foils. And all he could think of was the winter coat *Moms* had worn until the cuffs were rubbed thin and smooth.

"Like any of these?" asked his father uneasily, walking around and touching things restlessly.

"Yes, sir," he replied politely.

And then, because he didn't know what else to do, and had nothing whatever to say, he turned with relief to the suitcase, which was the one familiar thing in his surroundings, with the intention of unpacking it. Right on top of everything was a framed picture of Moms, and he stood looking down at it in a frozen silence, uncertain of the right thing to do. Moms, in the little silk dress she'd made herself, with the white feather showing plainly—

That white feather—he hadn't noticed it, until one day it was there, and in his surprise he'd mentioned it, and Moms had spoken of it, too.

"A gray head and a cracked heart. Life's full of casualties, Laddie!"

His father, looking over his shoulder at his unexpected rigidity, gave a sound very like a groan. Bending down, he picked up the photograph.

"Does she look like that, Kenneth? Gray?"

A white feather and a cracked heart—Kenneth took the photograph from his father's hands.

"She looks like that," he said steadily.

Without another word his father left him, and after his unpacking was finished, he went and sat in a window which looked out over an expanse of velvety-green lawn banked at the outer edge by a fringe of trees bearing flowers of red and blue and purple. He'd never seen trees like that before. Nor mountains like those over back against the skyline. Nor an outdoor swimming-pool built for just one family.

A sound attracted his attention, and he glanced up to see Joey, his brother, sidling into the room.

Something hot and ugly reared itself in Kenneth's breast. "Go away!" he said harshly.

Joey hesitated, his young, brown eyes widening in surprise.

"*Go away!*" repeated Kenneth vehemently.

Joey disappeared, with a haunting, backward glance of reproach.

A beautiful child, acknowledged Kenneth unwillingly. Too beautiful, like his mother. Like paintings upon a wall both of them. Too rounded. Too colorful. Too soft of eye. Too much beauty was unpleasant to contemplate, when it existed in the person of his father's second wife, and his own mother was not beautiful.

With a great surge of loyalty he told himself then that it didn't matter that Moms wasn't beautiful. Moms was Moms: just to hear her laugh, or see her eyes shine, was enough. Moms was *perfect*!

Life slipped into a repetition of days in which each moment would have been thrilling except for the persistent memory of Moms alone in the tiny flat.

It was all so new, all so different, from the life he had known that, reluctantly conceding his liking for the gay pageant of which he was a part, he began to realize what Moms had meant when she said his father had so much more to offer.

The big house fairly hummed with delightful activity. Guests for breakfast. Guests for luncheon. Guests for afternoon tea, when Paula presided over the tea-table in crisp, sheer gowns. Guests crowding

the white-tiled swimming-pool in suits rivaling the brilliance of tropical birds. Guests for dinner, when frequently he had his own dinner with Joey in the playroom, while Paula, below, moved among her guests in the shimmering glitter of cloth of gold.

His previous life had known nothing of the color and gaiety of his father's house. But, dazzled at first by the constant change before his eyes, he came slowly to perceive that somewhere beneath the pleasant surface of things was a lack. Over that lack he pondered, trying to define it and to determine its source.

Was it the uneasy relation of Paula and his father and Joey to each other and to himself? Or was it only a driving restlessness demanding constant change of background which took them from the house among the scarlet-and-blue-flowered trees to a cottage at the beach and then to a rustic lodge among the mountains all in the space of a few short weeks?

He did not know—was only sure that in his father's fine house and the quaint cottage at the beach alike was a definite lack of the peace which had been an integral part of the tiny flat back home.

The boy, Joey, lived a queer, isolated life entirely separated from the interests of his parents.

He had his own rooms, two of them. His toys, dozens of them. His own bathroom, equipped with a tiny, child's-size shower. A French nurse who was half nurse and half governess.

So many possessions seemed both to add to and to take away from Joey in importance. And in turn Joey himself was a sort of sublimated possession.

When Paula sent for him to come to the tea table

where she sat with a group of admiring friends, to Kenneth at least Paula's manner savored uncomfortably of the showman.

It was so very plain that Joey, to his mother, was not a child, but a piece of picturesque property. Her very way of putting him through his carefully coached tricks was not that of tender love but of laughing complacence. At such times he felt half sorry for Joey, the unchildishly self-possessed center of observation, although between himself and Joey existed only indifference on Joey's part and a vague resentment on his own.

Joey, of course, was not to blame, but his very existence was in some way an offense against Moms.

And yet it was impossible to prevent a queer sort of pity rising in his heart for Joey. For one thing, Joey never played: simply went from one occupation to another, assisted by dark-haired, voluble Mademoiselle.

Walking past the open door of the playroom, Kenneth grew familiar with the picture of Joey's young, gold head flitting about silently with an utter absence of the usual abandon of childhood. And when they had dinner together in the playroom, with Mademoiselle presiding, Joey ignored his elder brother, making no further overtures toward him after the failure of the first attempt.

"He cares for nothing, this one!" said Mademoiselle once. "It is usually so with children who are not wanted."

Uneasily Kenneth looked toward Joey. Had the boy heard? If so, he continued calmly building a tower

of blocks which he as calmly demolished with one thrust of his chubby fist.

Mademoiselle was right in that neither his father nor Paula was particularly interested in Joey, Kenneth conceded. A pathos in that fact. A pathos in Joey's yellow head and his dark, too composed eyes. A pathos in the fact that he himself could feel no tenderness toward his brother.

But Mademoiselle was not altogether right. Joey *could* care about something. Joey would have cared about *him*, if he'd permitted him. Reluctantly Kenneth was constrained to remember the color and light of welcome on Joey's small face the day he had stood hesitatingly in the doorway. And to remember the way the color and light had faded out at his own harshness.

Paula was very kind to him, campaigning for his favor with a generosity which made him uncomfortable. Somehow it was as though Paula and he were opposing forces in a battle Paula was bent on winning.

Paula was determined he should like her, laying siege to his affection with a persistence which overlooked his youth and eventually brought remonstrance from his father.

"Ken's only a child, Paula!" said his father. "And children have the blessed privilege of being more or less immune to the fatal spell of beauty."

In which his father was only partly right. He'd stopped being a child since he came to his father's house and discovered that the world was full of perplexities.

His father, Paula, even Joey—he could perhaps

have been fond of all of them if they hadn't been so inextricably mixed up in his own life and hadn't so curiously disturbed its values. If his father, Paula, and Joey hadn't been on one side of the scale of loyalty of which Moms was the other! But to care for them was to deny Moms, and that, of course, was unthinkable.

In spite of himself he did grow fond of his father as the golden summer days went by and the sharp agony of first loss which had engulfed him when he left Moms became a less distinct throbbing, having its acute moments only when something happened to stir his memory into a keener ache.

His father formed the habit of coming to his room for an hour's talk in the interval just before dinner. Uncomfortable for both, those early hours in which a man tried to fight past the barrier of a boy's stubborn prejudice. And then, as time went by, a growing ease between them and the beginning of a reluctant liking, brought to a head on the day when his father, looking down at him with a whimsical smile, bluntly challenged that prejudice.

"Your mother wouldn't want you to hate me, Ken!"

That was true, realized Kenneth. Moms didn't want him to hate his father! Whatever her own grievance, it fell far short of that. She'd said as much in her parting instruction, "Think things out for yourself!"

"I don't hate you," denied Kenneth uncomfortably.

He paused, his glance around the room inevitably drawing the contrast between his mother's lack and his father's plenty.

His father answered that glance. "Do you suppose I wouldn't be glad to heap all the riches of the earth upon your mother, if I had them to give, and she'd let me? Can't you see that it might be a way of easing the ache which comes to me whenever I think of her?"

His father *did* feel that way about it, conceded Kenneth. His father *did* want to do things for Moms. His father *would* have felt better if he'd been permitted to do them. It was written there in his face and the tone of his voice.

Vaguely Kenneth recalled that once, long before, he had himself done something which had made Moms very sad. Just a thoughtless, boyish breaking of a promise Moms had considered important, but as clearly as though it were yesterday he remembered Moms' face and his own urgent need of making it up to her.

"She won't let me give her more than barely enough to live on!" explained his father helplessly.

And that, too, Kenneth understood because it was so like Moms. Moms hadn't let him make it up to her after he'd failed her. Had explained to him that when you failed anybody, it couldn't be made up. That, in a way, the inability to make things up was a kind of punishment.

Remembering his own long-ago misdeed and its aftermath of ineffectual remorse, he experienced a warm rush of sympathy for his father.

"But you hurt Moms!" he protested, harking back to the source of his real grievance against his father.

His father smiled at him with the smile which held something of the quality of Moms' smile in it.

"And I suppose you never stopped to think that in hurting *her* I might have hurt myself?" he said.

Paula knew of the growing intimacy and was resenting it, feeling herself excluded and Joey thrust from his rightful place. She said as much one evening when he was half asleep in a high-backed chair in the library, and Paula and his father had come in together, not seeing him.

"You care more for her son than for mine!"

"I never discriminate between the two boys, my dear," remonstrated his father.

"Not outwardly, perhaps, but the preference is there."

A pause. Uneasily Kenneth wondered if he should make his presence known. If he kept very still, they might go away without knowing he had heard, saving both themselves and him the embarrassment of discovery . . .

Paula spoke again, something hard and accusing springing out in her rich voice. "Her son is holding you from my son—just as she has always held you from me!"

He couldn't, decided Kenneth uncomfortably, stay in his chair a second longer, and with the decision he rose abruptly to his feet.

Paula smiled disarmingly at him.

"We've been looking everywhere for you," she informed brightly. "Your father is thinking of chartering a boat for a few days. Would you like that?"

With a sudden, boyish forgetting of problems, he cried out that he would; that he had never been on a boat in his whole life; that he had always wanted to

hear the sound of wind singing across the water and of waves breaking against the bow.

Pleased with his eagerness, the elder two smiled at him and at each other, and at the smile Kenneth unexpectedly sighed.

Paula was very good to him. Unhappily he wished she were not so good to him. Paula might have resented *him*, instead of his father's preference for him, and with that resentment made things less confusing.

Standing there listening to Paula gallantly making pleasant plans for him, he was sharply aware that he would have been fond of Paula if she had not been his father's wife.

Paula wasn't to be blamed because she had wanted to be happy! Everybody wanted to be happy—so much that sometimes people took their happiness at the expense of somebody else's happiness. If Paula had taken her happiness at the expense of Moms', wasn't *he* now wanting Moms' happiness at the expense of Paula's?

His eagerness over the prospective trip faded. He saw the other two look at each other in an acute perception that a golden moment had somehow turned gray . . .

The something which had been only a lack in the big house became gradually something which verged upon the preliminary mutter of storm.

As the summer drew to a close, and the time approached when he would be going back to Moms again, it seemed to Kenneth that the conflict of wills surrounding him had reached a point where he had an

actual impression of unsheathed weapons playing about him, with all the while an outer surface of gaiety presenting itself to his view.

The guests came and went as always, but when he was with Paula and his father he had an unhappy sense that, despite their smiling faces, they had only recently abandoned bitter argument. And once he heard an exchange of heated words as he joined them.

"If your heart remained with her—why did you marry me?"

His father, then, apparently trying to puzzle out something. "I suppose—" he said, "that a man might be betrayed by beauty into a momentary forgetfulness of all else, while his heart remained where it was given."

Almost a cry from Paula at that. "And what of me?"

"I've given you the best I had to give, Paula. Love isn't a matter of compulsion!"

"I wonder—" said Paula, her words reaching Kenneth as he tiptoed out of the room, and halting him on the threshold by their tragic import, "if thieves ever gain any real happiness with stolen gold?"

It was not very long after that that his father came into his room shortly before dinner one evening with a drawn look upon his face and a lack of words upon his tongue. Sitting down in the window seat which looked out upon the swimming-pool, he said nothing at all for a very long while during which Kenneth sat uncomfortably upon the edge of a chair.

Minutes ticked leadenly away until Mademoiselle

passed through the hall at last on her way to the playroom, with an excited clicking of her small heels, which roused his father to speech.

"Paula's gone."

The dull voice added further detail: "She's left Joey with us. You must be very kind to him."

His father rose. Went uncertainly toward the door. "Your dinner will be brought to you here. I . . . couldn't stand the dining-room to-night."

"Yes, sir," said Kenneth understandingly.

His father, he knew, was seeing Paula at the dinner table in her beloved cloth of gold. Smiling at her guests, or, if there were no guests, at his father and himself . . .

Again he heard Paula's smitten voice flinging out sorry banners of heartbreak, "I wonder if thieves ever gain any real happiness with stolen gold?"

Soberly the boy went and looked out to where dusk was slowly shutting down over the swimming-pool. wishing that being glad for Moms did not entail being sorry for Paula. For his father, for Moms, for himself everything would eventually be all right, but there remained Paula, forlorn and heartbroken despite her loveliness.

With a start he realized that he had been sitting in the window a long time, that he was hungry, and that his dinner had not been brought. The big house, suffering from the shock of Paula's abrupt departure, was not functioning with its customary smoothness.

For the first time he thought of Joey, wondering if Joey had been likewise neglected, and remembering his father's injunction to be kind. Going softly across

the thickly carpeted hall, he looked in at the playroom where Mademoiselle and the cook were whispering across a table bountifully laden with food.

"She left the boy," Mademoiselle was saying distinctly. "But of course she would! She never wanted him."

A certainty came to Kenneth that Joey was not asleep. That he lay inside the inner room listening to what was not good for any little boy to hear.

Tiptoeing across the floor, unperceived by the two women, he closed the door of the bedroom behind him.

Joey was awake. In the glow of the tiny lamp burning beside his small, white bed, Kenneth could see his face quite plainly, and Joey's great dark eyes were open, although he did not glance up as Kenneth entered, nor did he speak.

Something had to be done for Joey, decided Kenneth instantly. It was not right that Joey's young face should bear such an imprint of misery. Somehow it put all the world wrong. There was something wrong about anybody as young as Joey being called upon to suffer!

If Moms had been there, she would have managed to make things right in the way she always did. Of that he felt sure, for Moms could bring healing to any hurt, however great. Moms would take Joey into her arms with her compassionate way of taking to herself all things which were weak and helpless and hurt, and Joey would be comforted. Moms would never think of Joey as an interloper. To Moms Joey would be his brother . . .

Looking down at Joey's inert figure, he realized

that Moms, as yet, was to Joey only a name, and that mere mention of that beloved name would not suffice.

With a boy's natural shrinking from sentiment, he hesitated briefly before, leaning down, he lifted Joey in his arms and sat down in the low chair beside the bed with him.

He couldn't have said, after a moment, whether Joey was crying or he was crying, but he was aware that Joey's head had settled contentedly against his shoulder, and that the wave of emotion between them had mysteriously carried away the worst of Joey's heartbreak and his own resentment against Joey.

Joey wasn't feeling alone any longer; he wasn't feeling that Joey was an intruder.

There was room for both of them in his father's house, which had suddenly become home.

## IN CHAINS \*

*Elisabeth Sanxay Holding*

WHEN Jarvis opened his eyes, he saw one glittering star in the sky, riding high above a frozen world. It was dark, yet he knew it was not night. He could have told the hour within ten minutes; six o'clock, it was, and time for him to turn out.

He got up stiffly and crossed the room to close the window. And for a moment stood there, looking out at the dark and empty fields, the naked trees with their branches distorted in a thousand crooked angles; a desolate world, with a cruel beauty of its own.

The cold made him shiver; he pulled down the blind and turned on the light. And with that, all trace of beauty vanished. He had a curious distaste for this attic room of his, with its sloping ceiling, its one little leaded window; it seemed to him sometimes like a trap, in which he could not draw a full breath.

He had always imagined that when at last he came ashore to live, he would have a room such as his parents had had in their old home on the Massachusetts coast, a big, solid, dignified room, with a thick carpet on the floor, and sometimes a coal-fire that would shine reflected on dark polished wood

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and the gilt frames of pictures. And he had seen himself always as Captain Jarvis, the man of quiet authority. Never like this.

He marveled to remember his past magnificence. As he dressed, in his neat, rather worn blue serge, he remembered little scenes; himself in a victoria, riding through the streets of some tropic seaport, leaning back, a cigar in his mouth, a figure of dignified nonchalance. And stopping, with a brief gesture, to buy something that had caught his fancy, some gift to take home to his wife.

There was a mirror on the chest of drawers, standing on its side, because the sloping roof was too low for it to be set upright; he had to stoop to look into it as he knotted his tie. And reflected there, he could see what had become of that Captain Jarvis.

Sixty, this man in the mirror was, straight and spare, hard as nails, with steady gray eyes, neatly trimmed beard, the graying hair still thick on his fine head. Ten good years or more of work in this man, but for that—"accident," the owners had called it; disaster it had been for him.

A long habit of command and his native pride, had made him unwilling to make explanations. The owners thought that collision in the fog had been due to an "error of judgment" on his part. Let them think it. What could they, in their snug offices, understand of that most dread of all enemies at sea?

"It was nobody's fault," Captain Jarvis had said, briefly. "It was an act of God."

They had been very decent about it, in their way. Jarvis had an unblemished record; and, moreover,

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there was something in the man himself. To see him sitting there, cap in hand, speaking with a sort of frigid respect, had filled the junior partner with an odd discomfort. Jarvis didn't impress him as a man who would be careless or lacking in judgment.

Yes, they had been very decent. They had retired Captain Jarvis on a pension, with many friendly words; not their fault that he had come to this. It was his own fault, his own folly and weakness. He admitted that to himself, with stern candor, yet in his heart he was bewildered, amazed, at his present state.

Turning out the light, he put the bed to air, opened the window, and left the room, closing the door behind him. He moved cautiously, a little stiffly, through the dark hall and down the stairs of the little house, to the kitchen. He turned on the light here, and from behind the door took down a black rubber apron which he put on over his neat blue suit. He filled the percolator and set it on the oil-stove, and a saucepan of water, and then he descended to the cellar. He stoked the furnace and opened the draughts, and, while waiting for the fire to burn up, he sat down upon an up-ended box and brought out his pipe and tobacco pouch.

He had only recently begun to smoke a pipe. In the old days his fancy had been for cigars, big, black cigars of a very special sort that he ordered from Havana. He could not afford cigars now. Here he sat, on a box in the cellar, smoking in his pipe the cheapest tobacco he could endure. And he wore an apron. Rose had suggested it.

What had come over him, that he allowed himself to be so used? It was incredible. He got up and looked at the fire; he was satisfied with it, and went up into the kitchen again. The water in the saucepan was bubbling now, and into it he measured, with great exactitude, one and a quarter cups of a patent cereal. The coffee was nearly ready; he cut a little pile of bread and fried two eggs for himself, and all the while he felt a sort of guilt, because his appetite was so robust. Two eggs made a considerable item in Rose's housekeeping.

The day was coming now; a cold twilight filled the world. He turned out the light and sat down to eat his breakfast at the kitchen table, where he could watch the eastern sky. There was no glorious dawn to-day; the sky that had been dark grew palely gray; the bright star had faded; for a few moments there was a clear streak of yellow light above the marshes; then it vanished, and here was the winter day.

A sound from upstairs made him remember. That was Rose getting up; no time now for quiet meditation in the world; the day must be hurried through in that fashion he so resented. He made haste to finish his breakfast, and by the time she came down, he had a place to set for her on the table in the dining-room.

"Good morning, Father!" came her anxious voice from the doorway. "How are you this morning?"

"Very well; and how are you?" he responded, politely.

It always seemed to him a most ironic thing that she should be called Rose, that lovely and poetic name. For never was a woman less poetic. Such a thin,

harassed little creature she was, with her hair dragged back into a tight knot; she was neat and clean, and that was all she cared about; never yet had he seen so much as a bit of ribbon to betoken any natural vanity, any wish to please the eye.

And that shocked him. His own wife had been so different, so gay and lovable, with her delight in pretty things. He had been always bringing her presents, lace from Spain, a bit of Chinese embroidery, outlandish jewelry, and she had made such ingenious use of them. He remembered a piece of figured Indian silk; how she had held it up, under her chin, smiling with pleasure, waiting for him to say what he always did say—“Suits you very well, Kate, my girl.” She had been the very dream of a woman, the sweet and gracious figure a man could keep in his heart through months of absence, in all the far corners of the earth.

His son had written to him as if Rose were like that. Well, perhaps twenty years ago, when the boy married her, she had been different, though it was hard to think so. Captain Jarvis had not seen her then; she had lived in California, where her husband’s ship came in, and he had never set eyes upon her until three months ago, after his disaster.

He had found a boarding-house in Staten Island where a friend of his, another retired captain, lived; Captain Jarvis was to have had a big, pleasant room, and the landlady, a sensible, cheerful woman, had promised to make him very comfortable. But before he settled there, it had seemed to him the natural and proper thing to pay a little visit to his son and his daughter-in-law, who were now living on the South

Shore of Long Island. So he had arrived, with a new suitcase, meaning to stop for a week. And he had been there for three months, and wore an apron.

In justice to her, he was obliged to admit that Rose had never asked him to do anything at all. It had simply happened. When he had come, his son, who was First Officer of a passenger ship, had come home, and seeing him, Captain Jarvis might have foreseen his own fate. But he had not. He had looked on, with secret astonishment and disapproval, at the transformation of his son from the smart and competent officer who arrived in the evening into the man in an apron who devoted himself to "helping" Rose. He had thought it an unbelievable thing to see a man, and a son of his, in an apron.

"I'll get the breakfast to-morrow morning," his son had said. "You look worn out, Rose. You take a rest."

The worst of it was, that she really was worn out, always, because of the preposterous amount of work she persisted in doing. Washing and ironing and cooking, and sewing, eternally sewing, for that girl of hers.

"Ally writes that she needs a new dress," she would say.

"Can't she make 'em herself?" Captain Jarvis demanded.

"She hasn't time, Father. She's studying so hard to finish that course. And she's got to look decent."

Captain Jarvis had his own opinion of this granddaughter of his. He had never seen her, and there were no photographs of her since she was a small

girl, but he had seen quite enough of that black dress-form that had been made to Ally's measure. And he imagined Ally to be like that, stiff and hard, and forever served by Rose, on her knees, with her mouth full of pins. Well, he would see her to-day. She was coming home, for the two weeks that would be the Christmas holidays for her, and a time of doubly hard work for Rose.

It exasperated him to hear Rose talking about it. New curtains to be put up in Ally's room, a cake to be baked for Ally, more coal to be ordered, so that the house could be kept nice and warm for Ally.

"And now if only Tom can get back in time for Christmas!" she said.

But Captain Jarvis had a great dread of meeting his son again. For when Tom came back, either Captain Jarvis must go on wearing the apron, or he must see Tom in it. And it was intolerable to him, either way.

Again he asked himself how this shameful thing had come about. He could remember the small, the innocent beginning. It was the day that Tom had gone back to his ship. He had pitied Rose then; she had been cheerful and busy all day; she had said good-by to her man with a smile, but there had been a dreadful weariness in her face, as if she smiled and moved and breathed with a cruel effort. She had gone out to the road with Tom, and long after he was out of sight, she had stood there. And Captain Jarvis, watching her through the window, had seen in her, for that moment, a pitiful and exalted beauty, the immeasurable fortitude, the faithfulness, of the woman who sees her man go off into the world and, with mute

patience, waits and waits for him to come back to her.

At last she had come into the house again; she had passed Captain Jarvis without seeing him, a blind look in her eyes. And in his compassion he had followed her. She had gone, as if by instinct, into the kitchen.

"Let me help you, my girl," he had said.

"No, indeed, Father!" she had answered.

But her lip had trembled, her eyes were misty; she had looked so small and weary, so very lonely.

"Can't you take things a little easier?" he had asked, with a sort of severity.

She shook her head, and, without looking at him, had set two irons on the stove and pulled out a basket filled with dampened clothes.

"I don't want things to be—like this for Ally," she had said. "I want her to have—a good chance—a fair start. And I want—if we can save a little—Tom could—come home to live. . . . He could leave the sea. We could get a f-farm . . ."

Tom on a farm! Tom, son of a long line of sailors! But he had not said that to her; he had stood in the doorway, frowning anxiously.

"I'll just press a few things—while the supper's cooking," she had said, and suddenly a sob broke from her.

"See here!" he had cried. "Leave that! Wait till the morning!"

"I haven't time in the morning, Father!"

"Perhaps I can help you out," he had said. "I'm always up early."

"Oh, if you'd just put on the coffee, then!" she had cried. "If I could just have a cup of coffee, first thing!"

That was the beginning. He had made the coffee that morning, but he had seen what a lot of other things there were to do for breakfast, and he had learned to do them. At the end of the first week he had insisted upon paying board; she had protested, but in the end had yielded. Then she had had a toothache; she had gone about for two days, white with pain, until he had made her go to the dentist and had insisted upon paying the bill. Then the roof leaked, and he had found her up on a ladder, making some preposterous attempt to stop up the ceiling, and he had paid to get that job done.

And all the time, no matter what he did, she was just as hurried and anxious, worked just as hard. A horrible life, he thought; inhuman; there was never an hour of the day when the house was serene.

So different from his own old home, that little white cottage on the coast. . . . He could not remember it without a stab of pain, yet he loved to remember it. His haven, it had been, a place of sweet content and tranquillity. His wife had never seemed busy; there had never been anything brisk and pre-occupied about her. Such a gentle woman, and so bonny, with her shining brown hair and her smiling eyes.

"She didn't 'manage' the house," he thought. "She *lived* in it. She was happy there. And so was Tom. And so was I."

Again and again he made up his mind to get away from this life.

"I could send Rose a little money every month," he would think.

But after his own expenses were paid, what he could send would be too little.

"She couldn't manage," he would think. "Not this month, with more coal to be bought."

And every month there was something else, and, try as he would, he could not escape becoming absorbed in these affairs of Rose's.

"Never did before . . ." he would think dismayed.

He had been a husband and a father and a householder himself in other days, but he had not been troubled by things like this. Never! Never had put on a pot of water to boil, never so much as saw the household bills. When he had come home, he had been made comfortable, like an honored guest.

"If Kate had lived . . ." he thought. "She could have talked to Rose. This—it's not right! It's—like a treadmill!"

How could he get off it? For three months he had been waiting for it to stop, even for a moment, but it ground on and on, this anxious, ungracious life of futile work. And it was going to be worse now, with Ally coming home.

"I've got to clear out!" he thought. "This would be a good time—while Rose has the girl with her."

He went to the window and looked out, so that he need not see Rose, but he could hear her quick, light step behind him. Of course she could not sit down and

eat the breakfast prepared for her. It was impossible for that woman ever to be at peace. The treadmill was grinding away, and he was caught in it, a lamentable figure, shorn of dignity. That was how the girl Ally would see him.

"No!" he cried in his soul. "It can't be like this! I've got to clear out!"

A reckless, a mad idea occurred to him. He would go to Hervey, the junior partner in the shipping firm, and he would ask for an advance on his pension, and he would give the money to Rose and get away. Even if his income were reduced to half, it would be better. Perhaps he could get a job as watchman down on the docks, and live in a little room, alone, in peace, a man's life.

"Rose!" he began abruptly, for he was not accustomed to diplomacy. It had been his habit to deliberate matters alone, and then to give orders.

"Yes, Father?" said Rose.

He looked at her. No; it was not possible to tell her, just now.

"I'll wait until I've got the money," he thought. "She's—she's a good woman. I don't want to hurt her. A good, kind woman . . ." And aloud: "I think I'll go into the city to-day," he said. "Something to attend to."

He spoke with such dignified reserve; impossible to imagine that he was planning to run away. Yet he saw something very like suspicion in Rose's face.

"Father!" she said.

"Well, my girl?"

She got up and came over to him.

"Father!" she said. "Don't do it!"

He was terribly taken aback; he could not speak at all, could only look down at her face in conscience-stricken silence.

"I know you're planning something for Christmas!" she went on. "Please don't, Father! You've done so much . . ."

Heaven knows what he would have said to her then, so moved was he by her pitiful mistake, by her face, by the touch of her work-roughened hand on his sleeve. But it was at this moment that Ally arrived, and he was saved.

A taxi had stopped before the door, and the girl got out, and rushed into the house like a whirlwind. Because he knew that she was studying to be a school teacher, and because of his observation of that obnoxious dress-form, Captain Jarvis had expected Ally to be a stiff, cool, dictatorial young person. Well, she was not. She was a little, glowing, dark thing, with a sand-colored hat pulled down over one eye, and a fur coat, and a very short skirt. She was as pretty as a picture, but he was not going to be influenced by that.

"Handsome is as handsome does!" said Captain Jarvis to himself.

She took off the little hat and flung it across the room, and seized her mother in a fierce hug. He saw then that her hair was cut short, and he did not like that.

"Frivolous!" he said to himself.

And when at last she noticed him, and turned toward him, he held out his hand with the manner of

that Captain Jarvis who had been a man of dignity and supreme authority.

"Hello, Grandpa!" she said, in her light little voice. But he saw that she was impressed, perhaps even a little alarmed.

"Very glad to see you, Ally!" he observed.

And then he realized that he was wearing that apron.

It was one of the bitterest moments of his life. For a moment he stood staring straight before him, over the top of her head. Then he untied the apron, slipped his arms out of it, and laid it on the window-seat.

"By Heaven!" he said to himself. "That's the end!"

The taxi driver had come up on the porch with Ally's bags. Captain Jarvis opened the door.

"Wait a moment!" he said. "You can take me to the station."

He went up the stairs and got his hat and overcoat. And, as he closed the door, gave a last look at the meager little room.

"That's the end!" he said again.

When he came down, Ally was in the kitchen with her mother.

"Father!" cried Rose. "Going . . . ? You'll be back for dinner, of course?"

"Yes, I'll be back for dinner," he answered.

"Wait!" said Rose and darted off, and came back again with a woolen muffler of Tom's. "Do wear it!" she entreated. "This damp, raw weather . . ."

He thanked her and put the thing around his neck.

He meant to take it off as soon as he was out of her sight, but he did not.

It did him good to buy a ticket and get aboard the train. He felt a free man once more, going about his business among other men. He bought a newspaper, but he did not read it. He was steeling himself for the almost insufferable thing he had to do. Not before in his life had he ever asked for money.

It was bitter beyond measure to him to do this. But he could not go, leaving Rose in difficulties, and go he must and would. Three hundred dollars was the sum he had decided upon. If he could get that for her, she could have those storm-windows put up, and new linoleum for the kitchen.

He frowned. Never mind what she did with it. It would relieve her of financial anxiety for months, and he would be free.

It had begun to snow when he reached New York. And, though in no circumstances would he have admitted it, the air, thick with whirling flakes, the roar and speed of the monster city, disconcerted him. He felt, among the crowds, among the thousands and thousands of unknown people, very much alone, and, for the first time, it came to him that now he was homeless. Always before, in any port, there had been his ship and his own cabin to go back to, but not any more. Not again. He belonged nowhere. It was not right; it was not good.

"I'll find myself a room before I go back to Rose," he thought.

He took the Subway downtown, and in due course

of time, stood in the presence of Hervey, the junior partner.

"Well, Captain Jarvis!" said Hervey. "What can I do for *you?* Sit down!"

Captain Jarvis' dignified air did not desert him, but the words he meant to say stuck in his throat. Hervey waited, and again he was conscious of a queer discomfort.

"Have a cigar?" he said.

"Thank you!" said Captain Jarvis.

It helped him, that cigar, made him feel more himself.

"I'll tell you frankly, Mr. Hervey," he said. "I want to raise some money."

Hervey flushed a little.

"Confounded shame . . ." he thought. "A fine old fellow like that . . . You can see how it goes against the grain . . . Used to be a bit of a nabob, too, in his way . . . I see!" he said aloud. "Well, we're all pretty much in the same boat, this time of the year. Christmas—Lord! I've got a wife and three young ones, you know . . . Whew! You have a family, haven't you?"

"Yes," said Captain Jarvis. He saw that Hervey was trying to make things easy but he would have preferred more bluntness, so that there might be an end. "It's a considerable sum I'm wanting," he went on. "I thought it might be arranged that I could draw on my pension in advance. I—" He paused. "It was three hundred dollars I had in mind."

Hervey was silent for a moment, his florid face turned aside. This was a request that it was impossible

to grant. The senior partner would never consent.

But, all the same, he did it. Captain Jarvis left the office with a check in his pocket, and no idea as to what he owed to Hervey's good will. Simply a matter of business, he thought it.

But he did not feel so very businesslike. He remembered how his wife used to say that money burned a hole in his pocket. So it did!

He went up-town again to get himself some lunch in the only restaurant he ever visited. And all the shop windows were filled with Christmas wares.

"Better deposit this check!" he said gravely to himself.

So he went to his bank. But he took some of it in cash, a tidy sum. And he bought presents.

Very particular, he was, in selecting them. None of your second-rate things for Captain Jarvis. He bought a hundred cigars for Tom; he bought a wrist-watch for Rose, and he bought for Ally a lovely little Italian silk shawl. She didn't deserve it, but it would suit her dark, vivid style. And incurably lavish, he bought a five-pound box of chocolates, and some crystallized fruits, and a bowl of blue luster ware that took his fancy, and a little glass box that had a parrot's head on the lid.

He forgot to look for a room. When his shopping was done, he went to the Pennsylvania Station and took the train home.

The dusk of the short December day had come. He was smoking a cigar he had bought, and he was filled with a great content.

"The chocolates—and the bowl—and the box—"

he thought. "Might as well open *them* this evening."

He never had been able to keep his Christmas presents until the proper time. He would bring something to Kate and say it was meant for Christmas, and then he would have to show it to her, after all, to see her face.

He got out of the train with all his packages, and went toward the taxis. But, on the snowy evening, they were in great demand; there was only one left when he got there, and almost at the same time, another passenger arrived.

"Both goin' the same way?" asked the driver.

Captain Jarvis gave his address.

"Same house," said the other, and got in beside him.

Captain Jarvis caught a glimpse of him by the strong light in the station shed; a good-looking young fellow, slender and strong, but with a look of resolution on his face that made it almost grim.

"Same house, eh?" said Captain Jarvis.

"Yes, sir," said the young man. "I'm going to see Miss Jarvis."

"Ah . . . !" said the Captain.

"Do you—know Miss Jarvis?" asked the young man, abruptly.

"Yes," said Captain Jarvis, equably. "She's my granddaughter."

"Oh, she is?" said the young man, and again there was silence.

They were out in the country now.

"My name's Craig, sir," said the young man. "I'm an electrical engineer."

"Ah!" said Captain Jarvis again, and smiled to himself in the dark. "She's very young. Not more than nineteen . . ."

"Lots of girls marry at nineteen," said the young man.

"I know . . ." said Jarvis.

He was thinking that Rose had married at nineteen. Ally—such a pretty little thing—not such a crime, after all, for nineteen to be a bit frivolous . . . His own Kate had been so fond of pretty clothes.

"I thought I'd come—" said Craig. "Once more."

Something in this speech displeased Captain Jarvis.

"That's not the way to go about it, my lad," he said.

"I know it isn't," said Craig, and his voice was not altogether steady. "But—well—I can't understand her, that's all."

"She's a woman," said Captain Jarvis. "You've got to have tact—patience—sympathy."

"Yes, sir," said young Craig. "That's all very well. But there's one thing—I won't be under any woman's thumb. I—"

The taxi had stopped before the little house; the friendly lights were shining from the windows. With an authoritative gesture, Captain Jarvis waved aside the young man's attempt to pay for the cab, and went up the path with his bundles.

And it came to him suddenly that here was his home, the women of his family, whom it was his duty to protect and his delight to surprise with presents. He opened the door softly and went down the hall,

and there in the kitchen he saw Rose, sitting at the table, peeling potatoes, and Ally, whom he had called frivolous, Ally was at the stove, wearing the rubber apron.

Go away from them? He had come home to them with presents, just as he used to go to Kate. And just as he gave all his money to Rose now, so had he once given it to Kate.

This idea astounded him. He stood still, in the hall, with the bundles in his arms, and he realized, with a sort of stupefaction, how Kate had used to manage him. The gentlest, sweetest woman in the world—yet he remembered the guilty uneasiness with which he had faced her when he had spent too much.

"I was—under her thumb!" he said to himself, amazed. "Never suspected it—but I was! Upon my word!"

"There's Grandpa!" cried Ally, turning. "Oh! What have you got, Grandpa?"

"Never you mind, my girl!" he said firmly. "Here's a young man come to see you—"

"I know that blue paper!" said Ally, in triumph. "It's a box of candy!"

And rushing up to him, she gave him one of her bear's hugs.

"Here now! Here now!" he said sternly, but his hand touched her little cropped head very gently.

He went into the dining-room, and set his packages down on the table.

"Father!" said a voice. It was Rose, who had followed him. "Whatever have you been buying?" And it might almost have been Kate speaking.

"Presents!" said he.

"Father! You shouldn't—"

"Look!" said he, and unwrapped the watch and the blue bowl and the box with the parrot's head on it. And tears came into her eyes, so great was her pleasure.

The door into the kitchen was open. He glanced in there, and he saw Craig, that resolute young man who was never going to be under any woman's thumb, sitting at the table, peeling potatoes, absently, his eyes following little Ally. Saw him wearing the rubber apron!

## FATHER'S DAY \*

*Charles Brackett*

THERE was an air of tragedy about Katherine the Great. Doug Calder was conscious of it from the moment he came into the nursery. Even while he was performing a riotous, post-tub ceremony known as roll mops, which consisted in tumbling the babies on a warm bath sheet spread on Lena's bed and tossing them in the air until they were dry, he could feel its depressive influence.

And yet there was scarcely a sign, just a certain distraught way in which Katherine the Great thrust back her hair, and an indefinable expression. Though himself occasionally subject to what they called the Westford blues, it always annoyed Doug a little when Katherine had them; and this evening, in particular, he felt that they were uncalled for.

"All set for to-morrow?" he rebuked her by implication as he gave Patty her final bounce.

Katherine the Great looked up from the buttons of Katherine the Small's nightgown.

"Oh, I can't go," she said.

She said it with a brave smile, which he had seen her employ before when he knew she was dis-

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pointed, and which he, never having been treated to tears, imagined was far more irritating than they would have been.

"Now why the deuce can't you?" he asked. "The children certainly have never been healthier in their lives than they are now."

"Oh, it isn't that; I just can't." And Katherine the Great, hearing Lena on the back stairs with the babies' supper tray, shook her head at her husband to discourage further inquisition.

"Why not?" Doug persisted.

"Reasons," Katherine replied; and then, as Doug asked "What reasons?" and Lena was there, she said significantly, "I've got something in our room to show you."

The babes being still at an age of credulity, cried "What? What?" jumping up and down; but Doug at last grasped the situation and followed Katherine the Great unquestioningly.

As Lena said, "Good evening, Mr. Calder," he saw from her eyes that she had been crying.

"Lena's mother is worse," Katherine the Great said, when they were closed in out of earshot. "I'm afraid she's really sick, and I can't ask Lena to stay here away from her all to-morrow while I'm off on a pleasure jaunt. I've had the children all day, anyway, and I'm dead, and wouldn't feel like starting off so early."

Once Katherine the Great started giving reasons, she could give dozens of them for anything.

"Oh, the devil!" Doug said. "Why can't Sarah keep an eye on the children for one day?"

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"And have her walk out the door the minute I suggest it? No thank you. It doesn't matter, anyway. I don't care."

Doug knew just how true that was. Katherine the Great had been looking forward to Mary Pynchon's luncheon for weeks. The plan had been for her to take an early interurban to Buckington, where Mary's limousine would meet her and take her the sixty additional miles, and, after the party, bring her home.

"I don't know why you women all act as though those children were a pair of roaring lions," Doug remarked, "instead of two little girls who are more fun to be with than any eight adults on earth. Exactly what is there about taking care of them that makes Sarah dread it so?"

"Well, if you want her to go, just ask her."

"Have you let Mary Pynchon know you're not coming?"

"Incredible as it will undoubtedly seem to you, I haven't had time. I was starting to when I heard Katherine screaming because Patty was eating her paints. Katherine's paints, I mean, fortunately, too; because if they'd been Patty's Katherine wouldn't have screamed; and Patty had chosen the green, which is supposed to be a delicious compound of arsenic. I spent the rest of the afternoon scouring Patty's craw, or maw, or whatever you call it, as far down toward her stomach as a tooth brush would reach."

"But why in the deuce do you give them things like that to play with?"

"My dear Doug, have you observed that it has been

raining to-day? I am only a weak woman, and toward four o'clock in the afternoon of a rainy day, if those children set their hearts on playing house afire with matches and really truly kerosene, I probably should let them."

"Look here, Katherine," Doug challenged her, "will you do me a favor, just as a sporting proposition?"

"Ask Sarah to take care of them? I certainly will not."

"No; let me take care of them myself. I suppose Sarah can be bribed into getting their dinner for once, and you'll be back for their baths; but for the rest of the time, I offer to take full charge of them, and I bet I'll do it perfectly adequately at that."

"How about the Pasteboard Pail business?"

"You just leave that to me. I'll take them down to the factory, of course, but it won't do them any harm, and I bet I can manage them and get in a good day's work at the same time. Will you let me try?"

Katherine the Great looked at him a long moment.

"Of course, you're wonderful with them," she said.

In her eyes Doug saw what was going to develop into a look of vast amusement. He put a stop to it with an abrupt repetition of his question:

"Well, will you let me try?"

"You're a temptation, Doug," Katherine the Great said enigmatically.

Just then Katherine the Small tapped on the door.

"You didn't finish buttoning my nightgown, mummy," she explained.

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Katherine the Great had been up some time; and through his half doze Doug had heard her move quietly about the room, dressing, when the nursery door opened and there were scampering and laughter in the corridor.

Katherine the Great kissed him and said, "There are our little hounds of spring. I'm afraid you'll have to get up."

The babies did sound like light-moving, gay, barking puppies.

"I didn't mean to sleep late," Doug reproached himself.

"I thought you'd need it," Katherine told him, and she thrust up a blind and let sunlight into the high-ceiled, flowery room.

"I'm all ready and I've got to fly down and gulp my coffee and run. Do I look nice?"

"Great!" Doug answered. "I'll put on a dressing gown."

"Good-by, if I don't see you again."

"Good-by. Don't worry about the youngsters."

"I won't. You're conscientious."

She gave him another kiss, but there was something absolutely diabolical about her smile. Doug was tempted to challenge it, but concluded that the only way to do so successfully would be to prove that he could do just what he had told her he would. In the evening he'd repay that smile in kind.

He went into the bathroom and was fixing his shaving things when he heard a sound from below and listened. It was both children roaring in full voice. Doug rushed downstairs.

They were at the breakfast table, and Katherine the Small's arms were about Katherine the Great's neck, and she was saying in anguished tones, "But I don't want you to go."

Patty sat wailing in her high chair, thick tears streaming down her little emotion-wrinkled face.

"You see?" Katherine the Great greeted him, as though the impossibility of her going was uncontestedly established.

Doug rose to the occasion.

"Go on," he commanded. "Make it a quick break. This is just nonsense. I'll attend to them."

"But I don't want—" Katherine the Small began again.

"Mummy'll be back before tea," Katherine the Great promised pleadingly, "and bring you both presents—"

She was going to say more, but Doug gestured her out with an imperious hand. She gave him a look with annoyance and protest and distress all mixed up in it, but she left. The children both continued to roar. Doug poured his coffee, ignoring the hullabaloo, his nerves fresh from nine hours' sleep. Seeing coffee poured always interested them, and their wails sank to mere bubblings.

"Who wants to put in the sugar?"

"I do," Katherine the Small admitted, though very mournfully.

"No, I want to," Patty insisted.

"One for each then," Doug said; and Katherine the Small extracted a lump dexterously from the bowl with the tongs, while Patty plunged them about in-

effectually, and finally said "I bettah use my fingahs," and put one buttery starfish of a hand in and dropped a captured lump from such a height that the coffee splashed on Doug and almost made him drop the cup, and on Patty herself enough to start her crying again.

"I can mux it." Katherine the Small took advantage of her sister's crisis; and while she poked at the drowned lumps with a slow thoughtful spoon she asked, "Can we have bacon for being good girls?"

"Well, I haven't seen much virtue about you," Doug replied, "but I guess you can have some bacon. Will that cheer you up, bean child?"

Patty was the bean child. The name was derived from *Bienchen*, which Lena called her when she was busy and golden among the flowers in midsummer.

"Yes," the bean child answered; and as though in answer to Doug's first statement, she also remarked, "I am a good girl."

That made Katherine the Small and Doug both laugh, and breakfast went beautifully thereafter; though prolonged, because bacon hadn't been prepared and because, when it was, the children nibbled it slowly between long, gasping draughts from their silver cups. Doug had always considered breakfast with the children as a brief meal, because, ordinarily, he shaved and dressed while they were beginning it and excused himself before they had finished.

"Here, how about getting a little speed into this?" he suggested once, but Katherine the Small merely held up her empty tankard.

"I want more hot milk, please."

The "please," without a suggestion, was so unusual as to amount to a command; and while Doug was marveling at it, Katherine the Small, as though realizing her success, repeated it with improvements.

"Please, daddy dear."

It was half past eight before Doug could swing Patty down and say, "Who wants to help me shave?"

"I do!"

"I do!"

They bounded their assents like little hobbyhorses. Attractive as the prospect was, however, they became absorbed in a game with the stair rail which made their ascent take about seven minutes.

"Come on," Doug stood at the top saying; "come on."

After a time, he went ahead and began lathering, and finally they bounded in on him.

"I want a poudit," Patty demanded.

Doug touched his brush to the end of her fingers and to Katherine the Small's.

They rubbed their pink jowls industriously.

"Look out!" Doug warned them, reciting a bit of American credo. "You'll grow hair on your faces."

Katherine the Small was enchanted with the prospect.

"Then Lena will have to shave us every day," she said. "I'm afraid we will wriggle and twist."

"Are you going to take a baf?" the bean child wanted to know.

He'd be so late in getting to the factory now, anyway, that he might as well, Doug thought, so he answered, "Yes, I guess so."

"Can we see you?" Katherine the Small inquired. It was evidently going to be a far more entertaining morning than she had anticipated.

"I don't believe so."

"Why not?"

"People don't like to be watched in their baths."

"You see us."

"I mean grown-up people. You won't like it, either, when you get withered and old."

Doug was surprised to see, in the mirror, that he was quite red behind the lather.

"But you're not old," Katherine the Small said charmingly.

Doug kissed the top of her sleek blond head, leaving a white fleck on it.

"Can't you two find something to do in your mother's room? You're pretty much underfoot in here."

"Can we clean?" Patty's great blue eyes were all excitement.

"Yes, that's fine. Go on in and clean."

"And I will sing to you while I clean," Patty promised.

What a circus those youngsters were, Doug thought, as he soaped himself and listened to Patty's rendition of one of Katherine the Great's darky songs called Suli. Of course, this wasn't getting to the factory bright and early, but that didn't matter once in a way, particularly as Miss Gyngell, his secretary, had a report to check which should be off on the twelve o'clock mail; so he couldn't use her anyway.

Patty stopped. He could picture her scrubbing at

something, her pink tongue out a little in indication of complete absorption. As for the women thinking their charge was so difficult if a person hadn't anything else to do, he couldn't imagine a more constantly amusing job.

It wasn't until Doug had on most of his clothes that the silence struck him as slightly ominous. He opened the door and thrust out his head. Both children were on the floor by the desk.

"What are you doing?" Doug sang out.

There was a moment of hesitation, before Katherine the Small answered very brightly, "We're cleaning up ink."

"For the love of Mike!"

"Pats tipped it over while she was singing."

Katherine the Small had been dabbing at the pool quite daintily with a piece of blotter. Only her fingers were black, but Patty had flung her whole person into the task and practically every inch of her but her bright hair was smeared tattoo blue.

"I'se cleaning," she luxuriated.

"Sarah!" Doug bawled down the back stairs. Then he turned to the culprit, determined that she should realize the gravity of her offense.

"Now, Patty," he said, "that was bad." It was difficult not to use an adequate adverb. The smile under the cloud of Patty's stains remained beatific. "It's not a thing to laugh about," Doug said. "That was bad of you."

The smile had guttered just as he opened his lips, and before his speech was over Patty's lower lip was trembling terribly. As he stopped she gave the first

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heartbroken, indrawn sob. Doug's sternness endured exactly two of them.

"Never mind, Pats," he begged her. "Never mind."

But Patty did mind. The sobs went on, and tears began to dilute the ink on her cheeks.

"Oh, never mind, baby!"

Doug took her in his arms while Katherine the Small warned him, "You'll get yourself dirty."

"Oh, murder!" Sarah said in the doorway. "Oh, murder!"

The outrage in her tone seemed entirely disproportionate to Doug.

"Get the cleaning things," he directed.

It was shortly after ten before Doug got to the factory.

"Oh, you've brought the kiddies," the slightly too golden Miss Gyngell said. "Isn't that lovely? I just love kiddies. Want to w'ite on the funny 'ittle type-w'iter?"

She jangled a few keys of her machine.

"May I?" Katherine the Small asked, as though to rebuke the excessive juvenility of Miss Gyngell's diction.

"Oh, isn't she cuit?" Miss Gyngell cried. "Can she really write?"

"She thinks she can," Doug said quietly. "How are you getting on with that report?"

"Just fine."

"Can you manage them while I go over my mail?"

"I should say I could! We'll have lots of fun, won't we kiddies? Isn't the baby darling? You don't want

to worry about that little mark on her face, Mr. Calder. My sister had one a lot worse than that, and she outgrew it so you'd hardly notice it."

"I don't worry about it," Doug replied. "It's some ink I couldn't quite get off."

He went into his private office. Miss Gyngell was going to be a real help. Lighting his pipe with a strange feeling of luxury, he read his letters. Then, as the sounds from the outer office were entirely happy, he took up his newspaper, thinking, between paragraphs, that much as Katherine the Great might laugh at the too golden and too anxious to please Miss Gyngell, Miss Gyngell had something. Any woman who could take care of those two children with one hand and check over that report with the other— Some man was missing a darned good wife in Miss Gyngell, and after a year or so of happy home life she could probably be persuaded to give up her peroxide.

Doug had rarely read a paper so thoroughly. When he was through with it there was still calm in the outer office, but to make sure, he thrust his head out.

"Everything going all right?"

"Just fine," Miss Gyngell caroled, lifting her eyes from her desk. The children were sitting on the floor.

"She's a miracle girl!" Doug said to himself, and he employed his unexpected leisure in writing a letter in longhand to Tom Scudder. That brought him to 11:30, and as the children dined at twelve, he rose.

Both babies were hanging over Miss Gyngell's shoulder and she was drawing pictures. They were draped in necklaces and bracelets and earrings which Miss Gyngell had woven for them from paper clips. Miss

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Gyngell rather fancied the tableau they must present and she looked up with a very Queen-of-the-Kewpies smile.

"Great Scott!" Doug exclaimed admiringly. "Do you mean to say you've got that report off already?"

He could not have framed a less tactful salutation to a lady expecting commendation of a talent newly discovered in herself. Miss Gyngell looked at him. He was beginning to know Miss Gyngell, and from that proud look he gathered that she was not only hurt but angry.

"Got off that report?" she echoed. "Of course I haven't. When have I had any time this morning to check it up?"

She paused. Doug was afraid for a moment that she was going to say something about its not being her job to play nursemaid.

"Of course you haven't," he agreed hastily.

"I should say I haven't!"

Among all the moods of Miss Gyngell's which he had observed, none had been one half so sinister. Her very knee action snapped indignation. She put on her hat.

"I'll get after it right after lunch, I suppose."

"You've been great about the children."

"Oh, that's all right."

"Say 'Thank you, Miss Gyngell.' "

Two utterly perfunctory "Thank you, Miss Gyngells," were singsonged, and before Miss Gyngell was out of hearing Katherine the Small began, "Why was that funny lady so cross?"

It was at their noonday meal that the children be-

gan to realize what a really good thing they had in their father.

Patty blazed the way by saying in her luscious fat little voice, "I don't like my hot mulk."

She said it every day, and the answer was, "Well, drink it whether you like it or not, dear." Whereupon Patty proceeded to drain her cup without further comment.

Doug remembered how once, when Patty was convalescent and Katherine the Great had been slavishly trying to keep her happy, weak cocoa had been substituted for the milk.

"Would you rather have cocoa?" he asked.

"Yes," Patty answered, putting down the cup, which she was just raising to her lips.

"So would I," Katherine the Small clamored, "and I don't like plain bread. Can I have sandwiches?"

"All right," Doug answered, and took down the milk pitcher and the bread plate, and told Sarah, who was in one of her silent rages. Sarah took them, turned down the corners of her mouth and flounced away.

Patty was pleased with the substitution; but Katherine, after one bite from one of the sandwiches, opened her mouth and began to roar as though it had been filled with iodine.

"What's the matter?" Doug asked.

"But I don't want just bread and butter."

"What do you want?"

"I want what Pats calls lamb cheese."

"What's that?"

Katherine the Small, at four and a half, hated being juvenile.

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"What Pats calls lamb cheese," she repeated, and Doug saw it would be agony for her to be pressed further.

He made the trip downstairs with the bread plate again.

"What does Patty call lamb cheese?" he asked, thinking to mollify Sarah.

"Pot cheese," Sarah pronounced.

"They want it in their sandwiches."

"Well, I couldn't know that," Sarah said, and made pot-cheese sandwiches.

"And can we have animal crackers?" Katherine asked at dessert, when her father put the plates of blanc-mange on the table.

"Does your mother let you have them?"

"Yes," she pealed the golden bell of her hair back and forth in affirmation.

It was true. They were allowed them on great occasions; and if this weren't a great occasion, how was Katherine the Small to recognize one?

Doug thought it a strange thing that Sarah forgot the way she did. He descended, intending to reprove her, but one glimpse of her back modified his idea to a query as to where the animal crackers were kept.

"On the second shelf," Sarah replied, not bothering to turn, but pointing with her thumb.

"Why Katherine puts up with that old harridan!" Doug mumbled to himself as he climbed the stairs.

The children made parades of the animal crackers all around their plates. It was getting past Doug's luncheon hour.

"Don't play," he adjured his daughters.

"But mummy lets us."

Finally the last pale, humpy tiger disappeared.

"Now for your naps." Doug tried to speak convincingly.

"But the candy!" Patty's big eyes positively protruded with horror.

"The candy!" Katherine the Small echoed her.

"What candy?"

"Mummy always lets us have candy."

Doug doubted. "I'll ask Sarah."

"But it's in there." Katherine pointed to the toy closet.

"I'll ask Sarah," Doug repeated, and went downstairs again.

"Do the children get candy, Sarah?"

"Yes."

"I'll be down for luncheon in two seconds."

"Ain't they in bed yet?"

Sarah had neglected to say that each child got one minute piece.

Doug got the glass jar from the shelf and passed it; both helped themselves generously and sucked their spoil with miserly slowness. At last it was gone, and their teeth brushed, under Katherine the Small's leadership.

"Now into your beds," Doug tried again.

"But I want to say my prayers," Patty wailed.

Katherine the Small began to giggle that Pats should have mistaken noon for night; then she saw that it was going to work.

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"All right," said Doug defeatedly; "say 'em."

"In mummy's room," Patty elaborated on her whimsy, looking like a coquettish goblin.

Doug picked her up to carry her.

"But I want to walk."

"Hurry up then."

In the bedroom Doug asked, "Where do I sit?"

He saw that there was a good deal of form about these matters.

"In that chair," Katherine the Small directed, pointing to the winged one by the fireplace. "No, in that one." She changed to her mother's chaise longue.

Then Patty gave the game away. She was standing by the window looking out.

"I would like," she pronounced in her most luscious tones, "to say my little prayers in the garden."

"You go to bed," Doug said with real finality, and he picked them both up and carried them to the nursery.

They were very gay about their defeat until he dumped them into their cribs, when their wails rose again.

"But we haven't any toys!"

"What toys do you want?"

"Mummy lets us pick out."

Doug held them to the shelves one by one. Katherine chose a lambskin kitten named Peanuts, but Patty insisted on a doll's stove. Their mother's custom was to put the toys they chose on a chair by their beds, but when they observed that their father was going to let them sleep with them they neglected to correct him.

It was a quarter of two when Doug sat at the table and the hash had dried to a gritty mass. He'd counted on a minute or two of quiet afterward, and was thinking that forty winks wouldn't be unpleasant; but the children were jabbering away when he went upstairs. The toys in bed had done away with any possibility of sleep. They were playing a mysterious game called moving pictures, which consisted in Patty's letting her quilt over the side of her crib, shouting "Moving Pictures!" and joining in Katherine the Small's peals of laughter.

"What will we do now?" Katherine asked Doug, beaming with anticipation.

"We'll go down to the factory and you'll play quietly in one corner of my office while I do some work."

"With the funny lady?"

"No, by yourselves. Now I'll dress you first."

Katherine the Small was very helpful about explaining small underclothes, but when Doug lifted the dress he had taken off for her nap she gave another of her Comanche shrieks.

"No! No! No!"

"What's the matter?"

"That's a morning dress."

"Well, you can wear it in the afternoon. I don't know where the others are."

"No!"

Doug was really afraid she'd burst a blood vessel.

"Well, if you can find one," he weakened.

Katherine the Small went to the clothes closet all smiles.

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"I want this. This is my prettiest dress."

Doug had some qualms as he clumsily fastened the wisp of net and ribbons, but he was darned if he would argue the matter.

Patty's choice was as frivolous, but with her costume she insisted on wearing a pair of absurdly sturdy brown boots which she called "my golf shoes."

Doug was protesting a little about these, when Sarah lumbered up with the information that he was wanted on the telephone.

"Finish dressing them," he directed, and withdrew.

It was Miss Gyngell. Miss Gyngell had apparently regained her poise.

"Oh, Mr. Calder, you haven't forgotten that this is the day you had that appointment to go over to the Midford Pulp Company, have you?"

"Great guns, I had! Call them up and tell Mr. Parmenter I can't come—that I've got an important conference."

"All right."

"Wait a minute. I will go, after all. That'll be fine."

The children liked to ride and it would be a bully solution of the afternoon.

The Midford Pulp Company had recently tremendously increased its equipment; and Mr. Parmenter, who owned most of it, had been urging Doug to come over and see his installations. He knew Doug was stocked with paperboard for the time being, but he hoped for orders in the future. It would be a pleasant excursion. People hoping for big orders in the future always saw to it that one's visits were.

"Well, young ladies," Doug informed his daughters, "we're going for a long ride. How will you like that?"

They both drew down their mouths and said simultaneously, "But I want to go to your office!"

"Nonsense! Maybe you can go there when we get back."

It was a bright dream shattered, however, and they both cried a little as Doug got them into their coats and hats. Doug was becoming somewhat professional in his attitude toward their gentler manifestations of grief. By the time he lifted them into the sedan they had reconciled themselves. He locked the doors, charged Katherine to look after Patty, and started.

It was twenty miles to Midford and the trip was almost a complete success; that is, Patty fell off the seat once and bumped her head only and had to have the car stopped while Doug comforted her.

One could see the Midford Pulp Company's plant from a considerable distance. Katherine the Small was interested in the conveyancer, which rose above its gigantic log pile like a viaduct leading nowhere.

"What's that, daddy?"

"That's where we're going."

"It looks like a big snake, doesn't it?"

It did, a long flat head lifted from the ground and drooling immense logs.

Mr. Parmenter, a small, jolly, lame man, was waiting for them on the steps of the office building. Mr. Parmenter liked life, and particularly his own possessions, a trait which kept him blessedly free from

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pathos. One felt that he regarded his own crippled foot with a happy pride in its unusualness.

"Hello!" Doug greeted him. "I brought you some young ladies to inspect your shop too. Have you got a stenog or someone who can chaperon them?"

"Better than that," Mr. Parmenter beamed. "Hello there, little girls. Will you shake hands with me?" I've got the best nurse right here you ever had."

Then Mr. Parmenter whistled and, in response, from behind the building there darted a gray and golden police dog, so big she could kiss Mr. Parmenter's face by hardly jumping at all.

"Isn't she a beauty? Shake hands, Lassie."

For one moment Patty's lip quivered. Patty didn't particularly like dogs, but the uplifted paw soothed her.

"He won't bite me," she murmured to herself reassuringly. "He won't bite me."

"I should say she wouldn't!" Mr. Parmenter laughed, and he explained to Doug about her name. "I always used to have Scotch collies and I got kind of used to Lassies and Lads."

"Some conveyancer you've got there." Doug set about the business of the day.

"Isn't it a beauty? Best one in the state. Ever see one work, little girls? There's a chain in the bottom of that long trough with hooks in it that catch the logs and it pulls them up to the top."

"How high is it?" Doug asked.

"About eighty feet. It doesn't look as high as that because the log pile is over forty just now. Let's take

the kids over and show them the trough. They'll be crazy about it."

They sauntered past a freight car from which logs were being flung into the conveyancer, going slowly in deference to Mr. Parmenter's limp. Mr. Parmenter held up Katherine the Small and Doug held up Patty so they could see the single file of logs as the chain pulled them along to a corner, where another chain caught and tugged them up the slope to open chutes through which they dropped to the log pile.

"Like a little train of cars, aren't they?" Mr. Parmenter said to Katherine the Small.

She answered "Yes," in her very small, shy voice; and Patty said, "Like a dolly pouf-pouf!"

"Why don't we fix up a place where they can sit with Lassie and watch it while I show you around?" Mr. Parmenter asked.

"I don't want to make you trouble."

"You couldn't make too much trouble to suit me," Mr. Parmenter answered, with that honest glow which only a true lover or a born salesman can put into his tones.

He called one of the men who were throwing logs, and empty packing-cases were arranged in a platform overlooking the wooden stream and Lassie and the children ensconced upon it.

"Take care of them, Lassie," Mr. Parmenter directed, and Lassie cocked her ears and looked pretternaturally intelligent and gave a short bark.

"You don't have to give those kids another thought," Mr. Parmenter expatiated as he walked Doug away. "Those dogs are the humanest things

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on earth. You ought to get one. It would save you and the wife a world of trouble. You tell one of those dogs to watch a coat and he'll stay there three days, without eating, to do it."

"Where did you get her?" Doug asked.

You'd have thought that the idea of a dog would have occurred to Katherine the Great, who had a darned good head. Here she had this problem before her three hundred and sixty-five days in the year, and he'd been on it less than eight hours and already had a good suggestion. That was just the difference between men and women.

Mr. Parmenter led him about exultingly, letting him peer into subterranean chambers where the logs swirled in driven waters until they were needed, showing him the gigantic molars which chewed them soft. It took a long time, but it was all to the accompaniment of extremely interesting shop talk and didn't seem long to Doug.

"Now I want to show you my transformer station where the juice pours in," Mr. Parmenter said at last.

At the foot of some steps, wiggling her rubbery nose, and looking a little injured and very ingenuous, stood Lassie. Doug was more embarrassed for her than her owner was.

"What are you doing here, old girl?" Mr. Parmenter laughed, and in explanation to Doug: "She's just a pup still. Wait till I've had her a year more. Wanted to see your father, didn't you, old girl?"

For one moment Doug hesitated with the idea of hurrying back to see that the children were all right,

then he thought to himself, "I'm just as bad as the women. Those youngsters would yell loud enough if anything was wrong, and what could happen to them, anyway?"

He did wish, however, that walking with Mr. Parmenter needn't be quite so slow.

The transformers were in a high wire inclosure like a garden of monstrous, drab, futuristic flowers.

"One hundred and ten thousand volts to each bank," Mr. Parmenter gloated.

"I imagine you keep that gate shut most of the time," Doug commented.

"Well, we haven't given any school picnics here yet."

"Daddy!" Doug heard behind him.

"Look who's here!" Mr. Parmenter remarked, glancing back at Katherine the Small, who stood outside the inclosure. Then he started on: "You see, we get alternating current—"

"Daddy!" Katherine the Small called again.

Of course, Mr. Parmenter had the same logical attitude toward children, Doug realized, and one should be casual about them. Still, Katherine the Small was used to attention, so he made a gesture of apology and turned back to her.

"What is it, sweetheart?"

"Pats went for a ride."

"With whom?"

"She went for a ride and got frightened. She's crying."

"Where is she now?"

"On the stick of wood. She couldn't get off."

"You mean one of the logs you were watching?"

"Yes," Katherine the Small said. "On the dolly train."

For an instant horror completely paralyzed Doug. A picture of the great sticks dropping through the chute forty feet to the long pile gripped his mind like an agony. Then he realized that he was standing still, and with a tearing groan he raced in the direction of the conveyancer. Mr. Parmenter yelled something after him, but he didn't know what it was until he found himself faced with a nine-foot wire fence. Then the words came back: "You can't go that way."

He ran along the fence, yelling at the top of his lungs. When he came to the place where the conveyancer swerved to its final rise he heard terrified cries, and caught a glimpse of Patty's little figure being carried up the incline.

She was gone! She was lost! There wasn't a chance.

He ran on. There was a gate at last. He pushed it open and cut across miry ground. The log pile, with the conveyancer rearing above it, was before him. He saw a log drop through a chute.

Patty might be on the next one!

Doug went stark, animal mad. The anguish of which paternity is capable has been rather under-emphasized in literature. In his tortured mind there was a flash of Katherine the Great and how she would feel, a flash of self-detestation for his carelessness; but all the rest was sheer aching love of that baby who was going to be so terribly hurt.

Doug started to climb the log pile, driven by an idea that by some superhuman possibility he could

catch her as she fell, could at least break the crash of the log.

A log appeared at the chute, dropped. Its impact on those on which he was standing knocked Doug down, but he'd marked the spot where it struck. That was where he must reach. He got up and started climbing there. It was slippery, treacherous going. He kept his eyes on the chute. Another log was nosing in now. Doug waited for it, shaking with a terror of which he was wholly unconscious.

"You can't go that way!" Mr. Parmenter called again, and he repeated it, following Doug's swift course as fast as he could drag his foot; not that the circuitous route around the factory would have been any more hopeful for Doug to take, but because there was nothing else to do.

Lassie raced ahead of him, looking back and jumping with delight.

Mr. Parmenter knew that he himself was utterly useless in the situation and at that hour there'd be no one near the conveyancer except the men pitching logs from the freight car far back, or possibly old deaf Ed Wiggin, who sometimes sneaked out to the far end of the conveyancer for a surreptitious smoke, and whom no amount of shouting, even at close range, could rouse.

Maybe the kid was wrong, he kept praying as he hobbled; maybe she was only fooling. Then he reached the spot in the fence closest the conveyancer and saw the little figure clinging to the log. It was half-way up. As he watched, the log slipped back a few cogs. The sweat of anguished helplessness poured from

Mr. Parmenter's forehead. Lassie came and shook her throat against him.

He couldn't have done anything, even granted a good foot, not unless he had wings or could jump—

"Lassie, old girl"—that thought made him turn to the puppy intelligence beside him—"jump over the fence and get the baby. Do you understand?"

Lassie was glad to be noticed; she bounded and barked.

"Shut up!" he groaned. "Listen! Do you see the baby on that log? Go get her!"

Lassie looked puzzled.

"Over the fence!" he said, with the gesture which usually made her jump.

For an instant Lassie gaped, then she ran back, took a run and jumped. It wasn't quite good enough. She held the top of the fence with her elbows for a clawing second, then slid down.

"Try it again!" Mr. Parmenter begged. "Try it again!"

Lassie ran back for a longer start, rushed and made it. On the other side, she stood and looked for approval.

"Good girl!" Mr. Parmenter sobbed. "Now the baby! The little girl! Go get her!"

For one instant it seemed as though Lassie thought he was imploring her to jump back; she appeared to prepare.

"No!" Mr. Parmenter shouted. "Don't be a fool, old girl! The baby! Up there! Go get her!"

Lassie turned and rushed up the stairs which flanked the conveyancer, and just as she started,

log carrying Patty reached the top of the incline and passed out of sight. It had perhaps fifteen feet to go before it reached an open chute.

Mr. Parmenter had done all he could. He clutched at the fence to keep standing.

Lassie topped the steps and disappeared. An eternity went by, then she came into view again, carrying nothing.

"The baby!" Mr. Parmenter shouted again, though he knew it was too late.

Lassie lifted her ears, alert, intelligent.

"Go back! Go back!"

She turned, but it wouldn't do any good now.

Then Mr. Parmenter saw, behind her, old Ed Wiggin, with a wailing pink burden in his arms. And it was only then that Mr. Parmenter succumbed to active nausea.

What happened on the summit of the conveyancer was never quite clear. Patty always said, "The doggy came," but old Ed Wiggin, gluttonous of heroism, gave a version which, at its most effective, practically amounted to his having reached through the chute hole and snatched her from the log in descent.

Mr. Parmenter had been too absorbed in watching for Lassie to note, and old Ed Wiggin's never too robust credibility was further shaken by his failure to mention that the mechanism of the conveyancer had been stopped just about as Lassie dashed up the stairs.

One of the men pitching logs had heard Patty's cries, looked out, seen her and run to the seat of power. He had, however, acted too late for Doug Calder's

safety. The log Doug had been watching fell. It didn't hit him, but this time the shivering blow to the log pile threw him such a distance that it took a doctor forty minutes to convince himself that no bones were broken.

Doug did not drive home. Mr. Parmenter took him in his big limousine, Doug stretched on the rear seat and his two delighted daughters playing nurse and vying as to which could pay him the more professional attentions, in a rivalry which twice reached the point of fisticuffs.

Mr. Parmenter had left word with his secretary to prepare Mrs. Calder by telephone, so Katherine the Great stepped from Mary Pynchon's car to find Sarah, radiant for the first time in the period of her employment, telephoning for the fifth local physician and holding her thumb nail ominously against the number of the leading undertaker.

Katherine the Great, though frightened almost out of her wits by the vague report, had the sense to dismiss all the medical faculty but the family physician and summon Lena.

"Daddy's sick! Daddy's sick!" the babies exulted.

Doug, while he said, "I am not, not a bit. What in the deuce are you doing here, you old pill peddler?" looked a sickly yellow, and when he reached the living-room couch sat on it heavily and let his feet be lifted up, and didn't grumble except faintly at the ice pack Katherine the Great suggested when the doctor couldn't think of anything to prescribe.

"Couldn't you get a little sleep, darling?" Kath-

erine the Great asked, when she placed it on his forehead.

"No," Doug answered, and he looked out from under it very sheepishly. "Well, gloat!" he commanded.

"Oh, darling, darling, you were wonderful!"

Katherine the Great's sense of humor always evaporated blessedly when anyone was hurt, even a little.

"Rats!" Doug replied.

"But I ought never to have left you. I knew just what a terrible thing I was doing. It's all my fault."

"I wish you'd gloat," Doug insisted. "It would make me feel lots better. Have you seen the ink spot in our room?"

"Oh, what does it matter? It won't cost more than five dollars to have the rug cleaned."

"Then there's a contract I may have lost because Miss Gyngell looked after the children instead of getting off a report, and I guess the Midford Pulp Company is about wrecked. I heard something being said about the man who turned off the power getting the wrong switch and completely jamming things. And my car's over there and we'll have to send over for it to-morrow."

"Don't talk, darling," Katherine the Great begged him, "and please try to get some sleep."

"All right," Doug sighed, but when he'd tried for a few minutes he opened his eyes; and whether he was perfectly conscious of what he was doing or not, what he said frightened Katherine the Great rather thoroughly.

"Do something for me, will you, dear?"

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"Of course, Doug. What?"

"Go to the top middle drawer of my bureau and get the white jeweler's box."

Katherine the Great went. It was when she saw what was in the box that she gave one great gulping sob. Doug's Croix de Guerre! He wanted it pinned on his breast, she knew.

"You don't think you're dying, darling?" she implored when she brought it to him. "Doctor Hanson said you weren't. He swore you couldn't be."

"I know it," Doug answered, then he seemed to wander a little. "Lena's with the children, isn't she?"

"Yes, darling."

"She takes care of them most of the day every day, doesn't she?"

"Oh, don't worry about them," Katherine the Great sobbed. "Don't!"

Doug opened the little box.

"Will you go and pin this on Lena?" he requested. "And tell her it will have to do her until I can write to my representative. I'm going to try to get her a Congressional Medal."

## LITTLE OLD MR. PIRT \*

*Charles Divine*

Nobody knew better than Mr. Pirt that his neighbors were living beyond their incomes. Not that they were his neighbors socially; only by geography, because of the fact that his grocery store stood at the corner of Maple Avenue and Chestnut Street on the heights of the Hillcrest section of Westville, and that it was the only grocery in that immediate neighborhood—where restrictions ordained that you couldn't dwell unless you built what the real estate dealers called “a home costing at least fifteen thousand dollars.”

Mr. Pirt had always believed that a “house” was a thing you built with lumber and lath, but that a “home” was something else entirely; that it was where the heart is, and that you couldn’t build a fifteen-thousand-dollar heart just by saying so.

He thought of these things on this warm June evening as he sat alone in his store under the light, keeping open for the sake of a possible late customer and the opportunity to read “Anecdotes of Abraham Lincoln,” or some one of his other cherished books.

Sometimes he would leave off reading and cross his arms over his narrow chest and sit very still for a long

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while, thinking. To-night his thoughts kept returning again and again, now with pleasure and now with anxiety, to the fact that his son Frank was coming home from college the next day.

Mr. Pirt's hair was thick, gray, and fluffy; the lateral wrinkle in each nut-brown cheek as deep as if done by a hatchet blow; his face expressionless, except for the eyes, which marked with quick lights and shadows the moods back of them.

The Hillcrest residents all spoke of him as "little old Mr. Pirt," and if they saw his light still burning in the store, then they knew it was not too late to drive up and get oranges or limes or ginger ale. If a subscription was being circulated in the neighborhood for the Parent-Teacher Association or the High-School Girls' Dramatic Society Fund, somebody would suggest: "Get little old Mr. Pirt to sign it. He's always most obliging." . . . "Yes, and what I like about his store is that you can get out-of-season fruits there. Perfectly luscious, my dear! I don't know what we'd do without him."

What they liked most, Mr. Pirt knew, was the fact that he never pressed them about their bills. He didn't dare, for fear of giving them an affront and losing their trade; they were touchy that way. Women whose accounts were long overdue, like Mrs. Claude Risley, or Mrs. Aubrey Bonner, didn't hesitate to call him on the telephone at three o'clock and say, "Oh, Mr. Pirt, I'm giving a bridge party this afternoon and need some things right away. Can you deliver them in half an hour?"

And though the delivery truck might be out, and

there was no one to leave in charge of the store except his wife, who was an invalid, he would call up-stairs, "Vera, do you feel well enough to sit down here a while?" And when, dropping her cane unsteadily, she had settled herself with a weary sigh in the arm chair back of the stove, he would start out bareheaded to deliver the order.

He was aware at times that his method of delivery attracted attention, carrying, as he did, the soap box piled high with groceries in a go-cart, which he propelled in front of him. It had been the vehicle in which Frank had been pushed around when a baby. Mr. Pirt was not as strong as he used to be and his back muscles being subject to strain, he found it easier to push a burden on wheels than to bear it in his arms. The old go-cart was just the thing!

So, pushing it ahead of him, he would trundle the groceries from his side door on Maple Avenue, down the hilly sidewalk into the neighboring residential vale of precise lawns and hedges—modern "homes" with trade entrances, and porte-cochères under which big-windowed limousines waited, in them sitting, sometimes, women as if on exhibition, like bright cakes under glass.

They had sons too, he reflected this evening in his store, his eyes brooding along the shelves of canned goods, as neatly arranged as the books up-stairs in the bookcase. The tomatoes might be the MacCready edition of Shakespeare, they were so red!

Sons the same age as Frank. And daughters, too. The less said about the daughters, the better! Showing bare knees, and more—

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Yes, none knew better than he did that the Hillcrest people were living beyond their incomes. Mrs. Claude Risley pretending to Mrs. Aubrey Bonner—he had overheard her boasting of it as she lounged in her roadster at his door—that she was glad she could afford artichokes and alligator pears; and Mrs. Bonner fostering the illusion, on the part of her neighbor, Mrs. Wickcliffe, that she couldn't get along without imported Gruyère or hothouse grapes.

Mr. Pirt had been a little afraid to send Frank to the same college where the rich men's sons went; he might come back like the rich men's sons, in ideas. Of course he was already a friend of Reed Weston—the Westons who were the leading family of Westville, descendants of the original settlers, unpretentiously well-to-do and living in that fine old Colonial house in the Hillcrest section which had grown up around them, socially attracted.

But Reed Weston was different. So were all the Westons. They paid their grocery bills right on the dot! And Reed Weston was the kind of young aristocrat who could find pleasure in another boy's company even if his father *was* a grocer! Reed was back in town now, a university graduate ready to begin the practice of law in his uncle's office, and he had already inquired about Frank.

It had taken all Mr. Pirt could rake and scrape together to send Frank to college last fall. The money might have been put to other uses, such as banking it in the hope of having enough some day to buy this old two-story frame building, instead of paying rent year after year. But Frank's education came first. "I want

him to have better than I've got," he had told Vera.

At nine o'clock Mr. Pirt put out the light in the store, climbed up-stairs, and took a chair in the sitting-room near the sofa where Vera lay, the patchwork quilt rumpled over her thin body. Vera was resting after having done the supper dishes. The housework tired her, though Mr. Pirt had done all he could to lessen her steps in the sitting-room and the kitchen. He had placed the gas stove just inside the kitchen door, around the corner from her sofa; and in front of the stove stood the high chair especially made for her, in which she sat while watching things cook.

Mr. Pirt liked the warm yellow carpet on the sitting-room floor; the sideboard—that had been Vera's mother's—with the solid silver fruit dishes; the clock's gentle ticking; the picture, in the huge gilt frame, of sleighloads of people arriving outside a gayly lighted house on Christmas night.

Sometimes, sitting here, Mr. Pirt would read to his wife, or she would sit up, with pillows wedged behind her, and ask him to draw up the marble-topped table and bring the cribbage board. In this room all their evenings had been pleasantly spent, in talk, silence, and friendly companionship.

To-night Mr. Pirt gave utterance to the fears that had been tormenting him all day:

"What do you think, Vera? Do you suppose Frank will be different when he comes back? It's been nearly a year."

"I expect he's grown an inch or two!"

"He'll be the same, though, do you think? Not ashamed of us?"

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"I guess so. He always was a good boy."

"Sometimes they come back different, Vera. I've seen so many of them in and out of the store. . . . Last summer the two Wickcliffe boys wiped out my stock of fruit juices."

"What time is it, Alfred? Time for my medicine?"

He looked at the old steeple clock on the mantelpiece.

"No, Vera. You've got half an hour yet. I guess I'll open the bed and get things ready for you."

After his wife had been settled in bed for the night, Mr. Pirt sat up a while by the open window, watching the cars swinging their headlights on the river road, on their way home from the country club, and thinking of Frank. A boy could change a lot in a year.

Frank looked the same, Mr. Pirt decided the next morning as he stood in the store, where his son had dropped his bags to shake hands, with the open door's bright square of sunlight behind him. Yes, he looked the same; the same eager, rather lean face; the same round, candid eyes—but you couldn't always tell by looks. Mr. Pirt glanced at Frank's baggage to see if it included one of those Hawaiian guitars. His attention came back, relieved, to Frank's friendly voice.

"Well, Dad. Nearly a year, eh?"

"Yes, I've missed you, boy."

"How's Mother?"

"Just the same. She don't pick up much."

"I'll run up and say hello to her. Be back for those bags in a minute."

When he returned, Mr. Pirt braced himself behind

the counter to ask the question he was trembling inside to ask:

"Well, boy, what are your plans for the summer?" Mr. Pirt felt that his whole world could collapse at the answer, that the shelves of canned goods could topple down upon him.

"Plans?" echoed Frank, smiling. "First, I'll unpack my things, and then when I get into some old clothes I'll pitch in here and help you. We'll make things hum around the store this summer, Dad! Where are the new strawberries? Not in yet?"

Mr. Pirt turned away, his eyes suddenly wet with tears, the tension gone out of his body. When Frank spoke like that, he didn't know what a load he had lifted from his shoulders. Changed? Not much! Not that boy. He might have known it!

Mr. Pirt told his wife that it made him feel twenty years younger that summer, having Frank in the store with him again. But in August something happened which brought back the weight of those years. Mr. Pirt was alone in the grocery at the time. Clif Titus, who owned the property, came in to tell him that he was going to sell the place to a man who wanted it for a gasoline station, unless Mr. Pirt himself desired to buy it.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Pirt," said Titus, while Mr. Pirt clutched the counter behind which he stood, dazed, feeling that his world was indeed collapsing. "But real estate values are going up. And I can't afford to let an offer like this go by. You see how it is."

It was a moment before Mr. Pirt could reply, and in

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that moment his eyes mirrored a quick succession of moods, from panic to a kind of stunned wonder.

"I see, I see," he replied slowly. But he didn't see anything of the kind; he saw only the calamity threatening him, the loss of his carefully arranged home, and all that it meant to him and Vera.

"I want to get it off my hands," said Titus.

"If—if I bought the place myself," faltered Mr. Pirt, "how much would I have to pay down?"

"Two thousand. Can you raise it?"

Mr. Pirt shook his head.

"No-o-o. I've got to send my boy back to college. Couldn't you let things stand as they are for a year, say, and—"

"Nope. Can't do it. This is a proposition that won't wait long."

"Well, I'll talk it over with my wife, and we'll see."

"Good. You let me know in a month."

But talking it over with Vera afterward did no good, except to increase the bond of sympathy between them. They simply didn't have the money to buy the place, even with a big mortgage.

"Don't say anything to Frank," he warned her. "We want him to go back to college this fall."

Mr. Pirt saw that all Frank noticed at first was that he spent several evenings going over his books in the store—evenings when Frank's blond head beside Reed Weston's dark one glided up to the open door in Reed's car after a ride together. The Westons were the first and last word in Westville aristocracy. Mr. Pirt had nothing to complain of about them; they paid

their bills. If the others wanted to kowtow to them, that was their lookout! But the Westons were independent; what finer example would anybody want than Reed Weston's friendship for Frank!

But Frank found out about Titus one evening, and came hurriedly back to the store to confront his father at his desk.

"I suppose you would have let me go back to college without knowing it." Frank looked at his father sternly as he added, "Don't ever try that again, Dad!" and, smiling, put his hand on his shoulder. "I won't move a step away from here until we get this cleared up. Let me see the books."

Among the items which met Frank's eye were:

Mrs. King Maudsley .....	\$206.45
Mrs. J. B. Wickcliffe .....	459.17
Mrs. Claude Risley .....	542.39
Mrs. Aubrey Bonner .....	320.50
Mrs. W. B. D. Owens .....	424.67
Mrs. Roy Lee Criswell .....	411.18

"If all your high-toned customers would pay their bills, you'd have enough for Titus," he said. "We wouldn't have to move."

Mr. Pirt nodded. But there wasn't much he could do about it. Once he had lost a customer, Mrs. Ackerman, by speaking to her husband about their bill. Mr. Ackerman, it seemed, had given his wife a checking account so that she could handle all the household expenses—but she had joined the country club instead of paying Mr. Pirt's bill.

In September Mr. Pirt told Clif Titus that he

hadn't yet found any way he could raise the two thousand dollars to make a payment on the place. Titus said he was sorry, and would give him another month to think about it, or to look around for a new place.

The only thing Mr. Pirt could find was located on the other side of town, where he would have to build up a new trade.

"I think it'll kill me to settle another house," Vera said when he told her, the tears swelling slowly into her eyes. "I'll never feel it's home in a new place. Frank was born here. Besides, it's so handy here, Alfred, with only the stairs to climb between the store and the sitting-room. I don't know how I'll manage it, all alone in a separate house."

"We'll have to manage somehow," he said. "But, anyway, it isn't settled yet. Something may turn up before October ends." He fell to musing wistfully.

"I feel bad about Frank. . . . I missed college myself because Father had too many bills he couldn't pay. And now Frank's missing it because *his* father has too many bills he can't collect. One's as bad as the other, it seems."

The October days began to pass swiftly, like the falling leaves which Mr. Pirt watched from his side door.

He never knew exactly what happened, but he remembered the afternoon when Frank spoke to Mrs. Wickcliffe in front of the store, inquiring if she had received his father's last statement.

"I'll send him a check soon," she replied coolly. Her raised eyebrows told Mr. Pirt that Frank had offended her, and Frank himself felt that she was

doing him a favor to let him deposit a box of groceries in her car.

Frank stood watching the car slide smoothly down the avenue past the Weston house with its shining white columns. In his mind flashed the thought that only a person like Reed Weston could help him. That evening he spoke to Reed.

The result was that Reed attended the next big dinner party at Mrs. Wickcliffe's, where also were the Bonners, the Risleys, the Maudsleys, the Criswells, and Mrs. W. B. D. Owens with her sister; and, complimenting the hostess upon the delicious marrons glacés, he inquired where she got them. The Bonners, the Risleys, the Maudsleys, the Criswells, and Mrs. W. B. D. Owens and her sister grew attentive. When a Weston spoke, they listened.

"At little old Mr. Pirt's, of course."

"Oh," returned Reed, "that reminds me, Mrs. Wickcliffe. I'll have to ask you to excuse me after dinner. I promised to run around and see Frank Pirt."

"He must be a nice boy." She assumed this from Reed's going around with him.

Reed nodded.

"The evening's the only chance I have to see him. He's busy all day helping his father in the store." Reed paused, and then spoke, as if casually reminiscent. "I was going over his father's books with him last evening. There's an appalling amount of outstanding accounts due him. Really, you'd be amazed!"

They *were* amazed, apparently, Reed noted in the

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sudden silence—amazed and apprehensive, as if expecting names to be mentioned in the next breath. It was the kind of dead silence born of awe and fear. All at once Mrs. Wickcliffe made so nervous a movement that she knocked a spoon from the table ringing.

For this dinner Mr. Pirt had provided Bar-le-Duc jam as well as the marrons glacés. He knew that much about it. But that was all. His thoughts, the next day, as he stood at his side door looking out over the roof tops of Hillcrest, were all of the menacing approach of five o'clock, at which time he had to give Titus his answer and sign the lease on the new store in the Fifth Ward. Once he bent over to tie his shoe string, and his hands trembled. Then he watched the leaves outside falling from the trees in beautiful colors, and sailing wildly down the street.

Suddenly he found himself envying the leaves. If he could only put himself in the place of one of them, and float beautifully away through the fine-spun sunlight of an October day, float away from cares and troubles to an Indian summer of forgetfulness!

Then, equally as suddenly, the postman appeared at the open door and thrust a letter into his hand—a letter which, upon examination, became an immaculate check for \$459.17 from Mrs. J. B. Wickcliffe. At first he gazed at it, stunned. He fingered it tentatively.

At last, when the reality of the check was a fact in his dazed mind, a singularly bright glow came into his eyes.

"Frank! Frank!" He called to the front of the store, hurrying forward. "See?" he said to his son, his voice shaking. "One of them has paid. She has! She has!" And then, telling Frank to watch the store, he ran up-stairs to the sitting-room to show the check to his wife.

He made that joyous journey three times that day, for there were three mail deliveries in Hillcrest which brought him checks. The last time he faced his wife with a whole fluttering handful of them, dropping on one knee beside her sofa.

"They've all paid, Vera! All the big ones. I can keep the store now, and Frank can go back to college, and you won't have to move after all, Vera. Not an inch!"

He saw a tear creep slowly down her cheek.

"That's good, Alfred." She patted his hand lovingly. "How did it happen?"

"It—it just did! I don't know how. I told you something would turn up!"

Neither did he understand any better two nights later, when Frank left for college and Reed Weston drove up in his car to take him to the station. The young men were laughing at something.

"Reed's going to keep an eye on you while I'm gone," shouted Frank from the car.

Mr. Pirt stood on the steps and smiled.

"He won't have much to do. I behave fairly well."

When the car disappeared around the bend of the street, trailing a cloud of gasoline in the dusk, Mr. Pirt went to the back of the store, took a book from

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the shelf, and sat down in the chair under the light, his hands clasped across the book in front of him. "Nice boys, both of them," he mused happily. "They have a good time together . . . with their jokes!"

## FATHERS \*

*Mary Singer*

HE had always been a hero to the boy. Nay, more. A magician, a wizard, a genius under whose cunning fingers everything came somehow, suddenly right. He understood the lad too. Better than the boy's mother did, even though she had a habit of saying, "No one knows a boy better than his mother."

The youngster was only fourteen months old when his father first demonstrated the influence he had with him. He had been unmanageable all day, the little rascal. Waisted, and fretted, and whimpered until his mother fairly wept her desperation on his father's shoulder when he returned home at night.

"I don't know what's the matter with him to-day! He's been terrible! I haven't had a minute's rest since I woke this morning. I've joggled him around, and danced him around, and shushed him until I'm ready to drop. I'm gone, Charlie. Take him off my hands for an hour or I'll go hysterical!"

His father stood over his crib where he was kicking his feet.

"What's the matter with you, son?" he asked, not as his mother asked it, but as man to man. "What's

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the matter with you, old man? Here!" He held out a strong, stout forefinger. "Grab hold there, and get up! You ought to be walking around by this time, sir! Not wanting to be held! There now!"

He pulled him up, still hanging by his finger, and stood him on his feet.

"Now, then. Hold tight to my hand. I'll stand you on the floor, and we'll go exploring. See the world. What you need most of all is a change of scenery."

They went downstairs together. First his father went to the pantry and found two slices of zwieback. "One for you," he said, "and one for me." He picked two luscious red apples out of the fruit bowl. "Finish the zwieback, and you get an apple." They went, then, to the front porch and started on their tour of sight-seeing.

"You see before you," began his father in a loud, serious voice, "a genuine reed suite upholstered in tapestry of the finest quality. Five pieces. Settee, chair, rocker, table *and* fernery. There's a suite, sir, that will last a lifetime! The price is more than reasonable. Payable cash or instalments. What say, sir?"

He looked up at his father out of admiring eyes. Wonderful, his father was! The way he could talk! He smiled a rather gummy smile and exhibited two rows of teeth, four above and four below. He opened wide his mouth dotted with the remains of zwieback and said gravely:

"All dorn. Appie, please."

"All gone?" His father looked astonished. "Jumping Jupiter, but you're a fast worker! Here's your apple, however, as per promise. Don't drop it on the

floor, now. And hold tight to my hand. We shall now proceed to the living-room of the Barclay domicile. If you fall, your mother will have my life!"

"No fall, daddy."

"Spoken like a man! Here we are, sir! To begin with the rugs: The one under the piano, your mother informs me, is a genuine Bokhara. What the marks of a Bokhara are, I don't know. I have, similarly, a faint though unvoiced suspicion that neither does your mother. But the man in the store told her it was a genuine Bokhara, and the man should know—eh, what?"

"Mhmm." He nodded his head vigorously and looked up at his father out of serious eyes.

He was having a wonderful time. And the apple he was eating tasted unusually good to-night. It must be because of the lovely red outside on it. His mother always pared that lovely red off with a knife. And she never gave him a whole apple. Just a slice, sometimes a quarter. Never more. But his father knew how to treat a man.

They proceeded in methodical fashion from the Bokhara rug to the Moussoul; from the Moussoul to the Turkistan; and from this latter to the Persian runner that went from the kitchen to the front foyer.

They were getting along famously when his mother appeared. She had washed herself, and tidied her hair, and changed her dress. She looked refreshed and cheerful. But suddenly all the cheerfulness went out of her face.

"Charlie Barclay!" she shrieked. "Did you give that baby a *whole* apple? Did you go and give him—

With the skin and all on it ! He 'll choke on it ! He 'll get a piece in his throat and— ”

She pounced upon the toddling figure, snatched him up in her arms, carried him into the kitchen, and forced the remaining bit of apple out of his remonstrating fingers.

“ Baby ! Darling ! Mother ' ll give you nice oatmeal ! Nice oatmeal ! ”

But he didn ' t want nice oatmeal. He wanted the nice apple. And he informed the world of his preference in a series of shrieks, and yells, and bitter sobs-bings. He got red in the face and would not let himself be put in his high-chair.

His mother got all ruffled and nervous again. She said to his father :

“ There ! I ask you to look after him for ten minutes, and the first thing you do is— ”

“ Oh, Emma ! ” His father threw out his hands in defense. “ For heaven ' s sake ! We were getting along all right. Who asked you to come down and break in on us ? I can manage him all right. I— ”

“ You mean you can make him sick. Did you ever hear of giving a fourteen-months-old baby a whole apple to— ”

“ Oh, Emma ! You coddle him too much ! That ' s why he ' s so troublesome. He isn ' t a baby any more. He wants to get about. And he ate most of the apple without choking, so I don ' t see— ”

“ Oh, yes ? ” His mother drew her shoulders up. “ If you know so much about bringing up babies, Charlie Barelay, why don ' t you go ahead and take the job ?

You feed him, and you put him to bed. See how you like rocking him for an hour.”

And she flounced out of the room to the front porch, where she sat in injured silence.

His father didn’t rock him to sleep. He drew off his clothes, rather clumsily of course, and got him into his sleeping togs. Then he put him down in his crib, pulled the coverlet up to his arms, turned off the light, and said :

“Good-night. Go to sleep.”

He made a sound as if to cry, but his father turned quickly on the threshold and shook his head.

“None o’ that now, mister! Snuggle down under the cover and go to sleep. Not a peep out o’ you now! No shenanigan! Sleep!”

He went to sleep.

His father went down to the front porch. “He’s asleep,” he reported.

“Oh!” said his mother. “You think he is. It isn’t done as easily as that. Just wait a few minutes, and you’ll see.”

They waited. They saw nothing. No sound came from the room upstairs.

And suddenly his mother began to laugh. “You’ve got him hypnotized, Charlie, that’s all. He does anything you want him to.”

When he was two years old, an aunt sent him a sailboat. His mother filled the bathtub with water and said :

“There now. Go ahead and sail your ship.”

He tried to do so, but the sailboat persisted in

turning over in the water. He cried bitterly when the lovely white sail became drenched, and his mother said to him :

" You're not holding it right ! That's why it turns over. Let me show you."

But even her way was no better.

Finally she said :

" It's broken. Let's put it away. Daddy will fix it when he comes home."

Daddy knew what was wrong, first glance. " Why, the darn fools ! " he said. " Will you look at the way they've got that sail tacked on ? Here ! Gimme a knife, will you, Em ? "

He had the sail right in a jiffy. Gave it a little turn on its mast and said : " There ! Now put it in the water ! "

The boat went. Upright. The full length of the tub.

In jubilation the youngster shrieked : " Mommy ! Daddy fixed it ! See ! It goes ! "

Oh, his father was a genius ! A magician. A wizard. Everything came right under his fingers.

He laid little things aside for him to mend every night. Even his teddy bear after the dog had chivied its eyes out, although he did wonder how daddy could fix the eyes when they weren't there to fix. He confided this worry to his mother, and after he had gone to bed for his midday nap, she called his father on the telephone.

" The dog ate the eyes out of his teddy bear, Charlie." Her voice was full of a humorous tenderness. " And he wouldn't go to sleep for fear you couldn't patch the thing up good as new."

"The little imp! I tell you he's getting wise, Em."

"Of course, he is! You won't forget, will you, to drop in at Schwartz's and get a set of them? They have them. They come on little sticks that look like short hatpins."

"Oh, I'll get them all right."

Now, as the years went on, he got to be four, the youngster did. And suddenly there was another baby in the house. A girl. And she was barely learning to brace herself against the kitchen wall before there was still another baby. Another girl.

A change came over his mother. When he brought her some toy that his father had neglected to mend, she muttered between tight teeth,

"Oh! Your father!"

He didn't like that. But he couldn't explain why. He got to be six, and he went to school. He learned how to write his name and do words in a copy book, twice each, skipping a line between the pairs. He did numerals in a long row, one under the other. It seemed only a day before he came home and related that an island was a body of land entirely surrounded by water.

His mother sat with him in the hour when he did his home-work. She had him spell words and recite his history lesson. But one evening she suddenly turned from her place at the table and demanded of his father who was reading his evening paper in the armchair:

"Why do *I* have to do everything, Charlie Barclay? Why do *I* have to sit here and do what you ought to do? He's your son, isn't he, as well as mine? Can't you take *some* little interest in his education?"

His father looked up out of startled eyes. He put his newspaper down. "Why, Em!" he said. "I thought you wanted to sit with him."

His blue eyes looked terribly hurt. And afterward, when the boy had started upstairs, he said:

"Must we quarrel before the children, Emma? I thought we once agreed that whatever our grievances we'd never air them in public."

His mother made a tart reply. She was rather harassed these days. "We once agreed on a number of things, Charlie Barclay."

His father answered this taunt bitterly, the sting of injustice hot in his voice. "Why do you talk this way, Emma? Why do you act as if I were deliberately piling hardships upon you? I'm doing the best I can. I'm working as hard as a man can. And I give you everything I make. I don't keep a thing for myself. I know I ought to be earning more. I know that. I ought to give you a maid to help you and a few comforts to make things easier for you. But for God's sake, Emma! What does a man do when he just can't?"

He sat with his son thereafter. Immediately dinner was over, they would repair to the front porch with books and paper. They wandered together over the geographical contours of the United States, Canada, Mexico, South America, Europe, Asia, Africa. They triumphed over the analysis of sentences, until both could say: "The subject of this sentence is so-and-so, because it describes the doer of the action. The predicate is thus-and-thus because it describes the action done." The hero-worshiping relationship was estab-

lished between them more firmly than ever before. Dad was wonderful! Nothing stumped him. He even proved the math teacher to be wrong once. It was in an example over profit and loss. And he could explain revolution and rotation in such a simple way that you wondered why the other boys were so thick about it.

When the boy was fourteen years old, he graduated from the elementary school. There was a new suit of clothes boasting the first long trousers, and a morning given over to commencement exercises. Charlie Barclay stayed away from work to attend. When it was over, Emma took him aside and made a request of him.

"Charlie," she said, "when you get back to the office this afternoon, I want you to ask Mr. McGibney if they can't give Junior a job over the summer. You know he plans to go to high school in the fall, and he'll be needing things."

Instantly he fought that suggestion. "Oh, say, Em! Let the boy have his vacation. How can you have the heart to send him to work? He's only a kid."

"He's fourteen, Charlie. It won't hurt him a mite to work. He's strong. He could do light things about the office. If I thought it would hurt him in any way—"

"But, Lord, Emma! You don't know what it means to travel downtown in the Subway these summer mornings! The crowds are terrible! It's worth your very life to—"

"Now, Charlie. You talk as if I were his step-mother or something. Be reasonable. Junior isn't a

child any longer, even if he is only fourteen. He'll be wanting a weekly allowance in the fall. He'll be needing money to join the different organizations they have in the high schools. He'll have to be dressed better than he has been. A boy nowadays—”

“But, Emma! We've managed all these years without his having to go to work during the summers. Don't you think we can hold out one year longer? The few dollars he'll earn won't set us any ahead. He ought to be going to camp, if he goes anywhere! He ought—”

“I know he ought, Charlie. I know that as well as you do. But it can't be done, so why talk about it? You ask Mr. McGibney, as I say. He'll find some easy place for Junior. You've been working for the firm so long, they'll do it for you.”

But Charlie Barclay held off. A day. A week. Two weeks. Every evening Emma rustled over to him and asked:

“Well?”

And he sparred for time. “Well, what?” Knowing full well just what.

“Did you ask Mr. McGibney?”

“Oh. That. No. I couldn't. He was too busy to-day. And in a devil of a temper besides. But I'll ask him the first chance I get.”

“I hope it comes before the summer's gone!” Emma could be snappy like that.

“For heaven's sake, Em! I'm doing the best I can.”

He wasn't. And he knew it. The truth of it was, he didn't want Junior to work in the same office with him. He was afraid.

There had been a day when he might have looked forward to the time when he could say to his son:

"Well, son, you're coming in with me. I've got a place for you."

But that had been when he was himself fresh in the business of the McGibney Press, publishers of the Yellow Jacket Library. Emma had been a wife of two years' standing then, Junior barely a year old, the house at Clarkson Heights just built, and himself an aggressive, agreeable, eager-eyed young man of twenty-five with a priceless sense of humor and a great confidence in himself to conquer the world single-handed.

McGibney had said of him: "Now, Barclay there, he's got good stuff in him. Watch him."

They had watched. In three years Charlie Barclay had progressed to the place where he had a little cubby-hole office of his own with his name on the ground-glass door leading to it. He read proofs, ordered mats and plates, worked out dummies, decided on type, requisitioned paper, specified book-bindings, suggested illustrations, wrote to authors, mapped out sales territory, and was in a way of moving into a larger office next to McGibney's.

Ten years later he was still in the cubby-hole office. All day long people poked their heads into his door to ask this, that, or the other thing. From morning till night his name broke the buzz of work.

"Say, Barclay! How about the proofs on 'The Lavender Scarf'?"

"Luva Heaven, Barclay! Where're the plates for the Griffen Book?"

"Cripes, Barclay! Didn't that Gaylor order go through yet?"

"Listen, Barclay! C'n we promise shipment on 'Laughing Eyes' the fifteenth?"

"Mr. Barclay? Sign here, please!"

Barclay! Barclay! Barclay! It was a pæan, sung at him from the instant he arrived. It rang up and down the passageway between the offices. Barclay! Barclay! Barclay! He was pulled this way, that, by the other employees of the McGibney Press, by McGibney himself, who strutted to his door a dozen times a day.

And yet the offices next to McGibney, nice airy places with carpeted floors and mahogany desks, were occupied by others than Charlie Barclay. They filled the directorial posts and drew salaries commensurate with such distinction. They went to the firm dinners and expanded their chests when the yearly profits were read off. They received bonuses and little gifts of stock in the company. McGibney called them go-getters and made little speeches of disapprobation against the desk-hounds who hugged their chairs and frittered their time away doing things that lesser minds could attend.

In his mind Charlie Barclay was a desk-hound, an office underdog. Hence Charlie Barclay remained in his cubby-hole, kept his nose down, and trembled over his job. And at thirty-eight, with his son fourteen years old, he had no money to send that son to camp. More, he trembled because his position in his son's estimation was at stake.

Junior was nobody's fool. Like all the young folks these days, he was canny. He idolized his father because his father was a hero, a wizard, an unbeatable genius. Nobody was more wonderful than his father. How long would that worship last if he once saw his father in the rôle he filled at the McGibney Press? Harried, hurried, criticized, roared at. And taking it all. Because four mouths waited on his weekly earnings. Because by the time a man is forty life sometimes has robbed him of his sense of humor and his confidence to conquer the world single-handed. Charlie Barclay loved his son, and he gloried in the hero worship that son accorded him. Hence he sought to keep him away from the McGibney Press.

Emma, however, gave him no peace. And in the end, he went in and did her bidding.

McGibney was fine about it. "Your boy, Barclay? Why, sure! Sure, we'll find a place for him. Bring him around on Monday. We'll take care of him."

Junior's job consisted of being a sort of messenger, printer's devil, errand-boy, mailing-clerk, and announcer all rolled into one. Officially it was his duty to show visitors to the persons they sought, no more. Actually, however, he posted mail for the girls in the stenographic department, brought in sandwiches for employees unable to go out for lunch, delivered plates to the various plants, ran an addressing machine, received and distributed mail, and carried copy to the men in the press-room. All through the day he went scouting up and down the floor. He never sat down but someone called him. Before noon hour of the very

first day his steps lagged, and catching sight of him as he passed his own cubicle, Charlie Barclay called to him :

"Junior! Run down and get yourself a soda." He tossed him a quarter.

"Gee, Dad, I can't get away."

"You go. Go ahead now."

He didn't know whether Junior went for the soda or not. He hadn't the time to find out. But it was a pale, heavy-eyed boy who went home in the Subway with him that evening. He clung to his father's arm while the train jerked and people milled in and out about him. When they battered their way out at their station, they were wet to the skin with perspiration.

Junior took off his hat and forced a weak laugh of relief.

"Whew! That was a tussle!"

He ate his dinner in gulps, as if the hurry of the day was still upon him. Before the dessert was reached, his lids were drooping over his eyes.

His father looked at him with a queer, heavy feeling at his heart. The poor kid! He was only a baby. Fourteen. What was the matter with Emma? Did she have to hurry his burdens upon him? Weren't there years enough of work ahead of him?"

He went out on the front porch, the evening paper trailing from his hand. Junior followed him, also carrying a paper. They began to read, each his own sheet, but it was barely a moment before Junior's paper slid from his fingers, and his father saw that he was asleep, sitting bolt upright in his chair, asleep.

On Saturday, after a full week's work, Junior re-

ceived an envelope containing ten dollars. He gave it to his mother proudly, and she kissed him.

"You're a good boy, Junior."

But Charlie Barclay felt sick and miserable. Ten dollars for running his feet off!

He found a grimy ball and called to the boy:

"Come on, Junior! Let's have a game of ball on the lots."

The summer dragged along. Three more weeks of it, past July into August. Scorching hot days followed by spells of muggy dampness. Mornings with the sun glaring in the sky, and evenings with the air like a wet, oppressive blanket. The McGibney Press deep in the morass of late summer fiction, and Junior on his feet without let-up. That dreadful Subway in the morning and at night! He had grown paler with the days, and his boyishness seemed to have fallen away from him. He was less effervescent, less voluble, and when Sundays came, he preferred lounging around the house to joining his friends in their play.

His father looked at him and shook his head. In the presence of a more important, vital, and bodily fear his earlier mental dread faded away. It did not matter now what Junior thought of him. The thing to be considered now was that the boy would be sick if he worked clear through the summer. He must be sent away to camp. For a month. Three weeks, at least. Somehow that must be managed. He lay awake at night planning. Puzzling. Worrying. He nagged Emma until she broke down and wept. The hot weather was taking it out of her, too. She was fagged, and her nerves were frazzled.

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"Let me alone, Charlie!" she stormed. "What can I do? Why do you keep talking to me? As if I'm standing in the way of his going to camp. Send him! If you can manage it, send him! God knows, I'm willing!"

On a staggeringly hot morning, an accident in the Subway delayed Charlie Barclay from reaching his office on time. There was a collision, and scores of passengers were wounded. Extricating himself and Junior after more than an hour's waiting, he sent the boy ahead and remained behind to render whatever service he could.

He reached the McGibney plant close to the noon hour, and immediately the whole organization seemed to come down upon him. A shipment of books had gone astray. There had been wires, telephones, long-distance arguments, McGibney, his staff of go-getters, the men in the shipping-room, the chief shipping-clerk had gone stamping into the little cubby-hole with Charlie Barclay's name on the ground-glass door.

"Where's Barclay? Anybody seen Barclay?"

Some one bethought himself to inquire of Junior, and when he had explained all settled themselves down to waiting, while McGibney fired off questions. Who had answered the order? Barclay. Who had put it through? Barclay. When had it been shipped? Barclay knew. Where had it been shipped? Ask Barclay. What books had been shipped? How many? Only Barclay knew. McGibney fumed. He fretted. His voice took on a rasp.

The explosion that broke when Charlie Barclay

stepped out of the elevator sizzled for the rest of the day. He knew this. He knew that. He answered this. He answered that. Things had piled up on his desk. Between clearing these and attending to new matters he located the missing shipment of books. All afternoon he sat in a perspiration and a tremor. He had no lunch, and his stomach was hollow within him. With it all there was the heat, remorseless, oppressive, grinding down resistance.

He was fairly washed out when he went to meet Junior at six. His face was drawn, and his tongue felt parched. Together they fought their way into the Subway. Somehow Junior managed to obtain a seat, and he urged his father into it.

"Go on, Dad. I'm not tired."

His father closed his eyes while the train thundered through the tunnel. He must have gone off in a little doze, for when he opened his eyes, they were almost home, and Junior was looking at him with a sympathetic smile on his face.

"I bet you're tired, Dad. One sure corker, to-day was!"

Charlie Barclay nodded.

"Gee! You shoulda heard them in the office this morning, Dad, when you didn't come in. Everyone was running around looking for you. Seems they can't do a thing if you're not there. My gosh! They gotta ask you every little thing! I wonder what they'd do if you didn't come in for a week? I bet they'd have to close down!"

Charlie Barclay shook his head. A strange little warmth crept into his heart and fluttered there. He

reached out and took Junior's hand into his own. The funny, blind little kid! He *would* persist in making a hero of his father; he *would* magnify and exaggerate his puny, routine accomplishments into deeds of importance. And he had feared disillusion! Relief flooded him. His exhaustion was dissipated.

He said lightly, a note of well-assumed modesty in his voice: "Oh, I guess they'd get along without me, Junior. They'd get along all right."

Junior answered warmly, sticking to his original contention: "No, they wouldn't, Dad! Nobody knows anything around the place. Everybody comes to ask you about the least thing. Don't I hear 'em? And this morning, when those books couldn't be found, and there was all that excitement, I even heard Mr. McGibney giving Mr. Lucas an argument, and he asked: 'What kind of a place is this anyway? Doesn't anybody know anything except Barclay?' "

Charlie Barclay sat suddenly forward in his seat. His eyes searched his son's face with something eager and sharp in their depths.

"Did he say that, Junior? Just like that? Just those words?"

Junior made a motion across his chest with his forefinger. "Cross my heart, Dad. Just like that. And just those words."

Charlie Barclay patted his son's hand. A wild elation was leaping through his blood, an elation that was a mingling of thanksgiving and discovery. In the first heat of that elation he could only think that he was saved with his son. To him he would always remain what he had been—a hero, a wizard, a magi-

cian than whom none was more wonderful. But in the calmer moment that followed that first joy came the dawning of a realization that held him tensed and thoughtful for more practical reasons.

Fool that he had been all these years! To hide the shame of being a desk-hound! When it was a desk-hound who ran the destinies of the entire McGibney plant! Yes, he, Charlie Barclay did just that! He did know more than anyone else in the organization! He did, with his final O.K., set the wheels of things going! They did ask his opinion of every little matter, from ordering paper to buying a script! And he had let himself be considered a nincompoop stuffed out of the way into a cubby-hole! Ah, but McGibney was going to pay for that! To-morrow! Wait until to-morrow!

There was a flush of excitement in each of his cheeks as he took Junior's arm on the way out of the Subway. His step was like a boy's, light, energetic, purposeful.

He said: "Listen, Junior. I've got a surprise for you. Only don't tell your mother until Saturday. You're quitting work the end of the week. You can go to camp for the rest of the summer."

Junior stopped in his tracks. His whole face lit up with pleasure. If they hadn't been out on the street, he would have thrown his arms wildly about his father's neck. As it was, he bounced up and down like a jack-in-the-box, his voice shrill with suppressed gladness.

"Gee, Dad! Gee, that's great! Gee, c'n I go to Scotty Judson's camp? It's a wonderful place!"

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"You can go to any camp you want to go, Junior. Take your choice."

"Whoopala!" He threw his hat jubilantly into the air and danced homeward, a new boy fired with new life.

He ran out to communicate the good news to some of his friends after dinner, and his mother said:

"Junior's kind of excited to-night, isn't he, Charlie?"

His father did not answer—then. But late that night, when he was getting ready for bed, he made a remark that puzzled Emma Barclay for days.

"You know, Emma," he said, "it's funny about children. We think it's we who make them what they are, but when you get right down to it, it's they who make us what we are!"

## THE FATHER WHO DIDN'T UNDERSTAND \*

*Priscilla Hovey*

"I WOULDN'T send that letter to Sonny, Mother," Tom Dodge remonstrated gently, clumsily returning the crisply folded sheets to their envelope. He always remonstrated gently. One did, with Emily.

"Why not?" Emily asked quickly and sharply. Her thin, angular cheeks had two vivid red spots on them, her gray-blue eyes shone with the zeal of the righteous reformer. She had made it clear to Malcolm just what was expected of him!

"Well, I dunno," drawled Tom Dodge; "but 'pears to me that the boy's goin' to be sort of upset over these exams anyway, an' this letter— Seems to me, it might make him lose his head." He said this with no degree of certainty. One never uttered one's own convictions with certainty, not to Emily.

"Nonsense!" she replied impatiently. "He must realize that everyone's expecting him to pass with honors. There he was, valedictorian of his class last year. The good name of our high school depends on him, as I said in the letter. Mr. Holcombe has written him, too."

"He has?" Tom Dodge scratched his head and

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sighed in dismay. Mr. Holcombe was the principal of the Weston High School.

"I'm rather afraid Malcolm hasn't been doing his usual grade of work," continued Mrs. Dodge firmly, "and he needs this letter to make him buckle right down."

Mr. Dodge's good-natured, tired face flushed uneasily. He wished that Emily wouldn't talk so about Sonny.

"Why, Sonny's only sixteen, Mother," he said. "He's the youngest boy up there, an' a high school ain't like a big college; besides, he ain't got you to help him." This last remark was unfortunate, as he saw by the ominous tightening of Emily's lips; nevertheless, he floundered on, "I'd be proud if he jest passed, darned if I wouldn't!"

Then they came. Those words which were like so many iron weights on the spirit of Tom Dodge, so many sharp thorns in his soul: "You don't understand!"

Eighteen years ago, Emily had said them with less severity, less swiftly, less surely, and with less of superiority. And eighteen years ago they had fallen rather lightly on the erect head and the broad shoulders of Tom Dodge.

The ocean constantly thundering and pounding against the cliff will gradually erode its seemingly adamant resistance. Those words, thundering and pounding against the spirit and the soul of Tom Dodge, had now caused the head to be slightly bowed and the shoulders slightly stooped. Possibly in the very beginning, when the first wave assaulted the first

cliff, the latter tried to fight back. So, at first, Tom Dodge tried, courteously and humbly. Now, he merely shrugged his shoulders in tacit acceptance of the verdict, went for his coat and hat, and announced that it was time to go to the store.

"The mail man's coming down the street," said Emily. "Be sure you give him the letter."

On his way to the store, Tom Dodge was still thinking of that letter. Of course he had given it to the mail man. He knew Emily would be watching from the window.

Poor Sonny! Mother writing him and Mr. Holcombe. Just why the future of the whole confounded town should be placed on the boy's shoulders, he didn't understand. That was the trouble. He never understood, according to Emily. Probably she was right. She always was.

Then he shook his head. No, she was not right, not about that letter. Hadn't Sonny confided to him when he was home Christmas that the thought of those old exams made him feel "all gone inside"? "Sonny's jest like me," he mused. "Those letters won't make him buckle down. They'll skeer him to death."

He smiled as a thought came. He was still smiling when he entered the store of his business neighbor, Sam Hoskins, grocer and dealer in penny candies.

"What special kind of stuff did that boy of mine used to like most, Sam?" he queried genially. "He used to spend 'bout all of his allowance in here, so you oughter know."

Mr. Hoskins, a squat little man wrapped in a big white apron, chuckled. "Gosh, I dunno," he said.

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"Them choc'late things there an' them lick'rish sticks, an' them—"

"Well, I guess you'd better pack me up a box of all of 'em," Mr. Dodge interrupted; "then we'll be sure to hit the right ones. Make it a five-pounder."

Wouldn't Sonny open his eyes when he saw that! Tom Dodge thrust his hands in his pockets and whistled as he teetered back and forward on his heels.

"A five-pounder, eh!" ejaculated Mr. Hoskins,

"Think that'll be enough to give him a good stum-mick ache?" asked Tom Dodge jovially.

"Well, 'twould be if he et 'em all; but he'll probably get jest a couple handfuls himself," Sam answered, emptying his entire supply of "choc'late things" and "lick'rish sticks." "The rest o' the boys'll probably get most of it. Whenever he come in here he always had a dozen with him, an' always went shares with 'em, too. Nothin' stingy 'bout him."

"No, sir-ee!" the father agreed, his shoulders suddenly straight.

"Doin' well at school?" inquired Mr. Hoskins casually.

"Y-yes," Tom Dodge replied, noncommittal.

"Well, I 'spose you'll be glad when he gets home an' goes in the store with you."

"I—I guess he probably won't go in the store," Mr. Dodge answered slowly.

"Is that so? Well, well!" commented his old friend in surprise. "I always thought that's the way 'twould be. Now, young Sam's goin' in with me. I tell you, it makes you feel sort of at rest to know you're handin' down the old store to your son an' not to some

stranger." He did not notice the grayness which had overspread the face of his listener. "But I guess your boy's cut out for somethin' else. A college professor, I s'pose."

"I s'pose so," Tom replied dully.

Later, in his own store, alone in the dusty little corner boarded in from the counters and shelves, which he pretentiously called his office, he firmly packed the box, lavishly labeling it with cautions of "Perishable," and "Special Delivery."

Then he reached in an especially dingy pigeonhole in the roll-top desk for a sheet of paper. He would write Sonny just a note. The paper was yellow and brittle. Tom Dodge's financial dealings were conducted from hand to hand and mouth to mouth. A promise to pay or a bill paid needed no record on paper.

He brushed the top coating of dust on his coat sleeve and thrust the pen in the murky ink well until a tidal wave seemed imminent. As usual, the pen was clogged and left showers of ink in its trail. His hands were hot and sticky, so that the letter when finished was one to send shivers down the spine of Emily Dodge.

Her husband, however, was pleased. True, it wasn't a very long letter or one rich in information. He always had been a poor hand at letter writing. Yet the last sentence pleased him. He re-read it:

"I know you'll do the best you can, Sonny," it went; "and no matter how you come out remember your old Dad is right with you."

A tear wavered on his eyelashes and threatened to trickle down his cheek. He rose quickly, coughed

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loudly, and called, "Hi, there, Jo, I'm going over to the post office. Have an eye on things, will you?"

Returning, he went again to the rolltop desk and from the bottom drawer, which was piled high with disorderly hodgepodge, drew forth a tin box. This he opened hesitantly. It was a long time since he had looked at it. There it was, grown yellow and brittle, of course, even as the paper he had just used, but with the head still in valiant black:

*Thomas A. Dodge & Son  
Dealers in All Kinds of Hardware  
Farm Implements a Specialty*

How proud he had been of that paper when he had first ordered it. He hadn't told Emily a thing about it, had had it printed as a surprise. He remembered the night he had taken it home to show it to her, the night of Sonny's sixth birthday. For the first time the barbed darts of those words, "You don't understand," were thrust so deep that their poison-pronged edges remained and the wound never healed. There would be no need of "& Son," Emily announced.

Once before those words had hurt. That was when Sonny was born. Somehow, he had thought the boy would be named for him. No self-exaltation caused the presumption. It was merely the usual procedure. He was named for his father. There was old Sam Hoskins, young Sam Hoskins; old Jake Eggers, young Jake Eggers; old Ned Potter, young Ned Potter. . . .

So he reverently and shyly addressed the unpre-

possessing red and purple miracle, then three days old, "Hi, there, you little Tommy Dodge!"

Emily raised her head. When the nurse had left the room, she said softly but with characteristic firmness, "I don't want to name him that, Tom. It'll be Big Tom and Little Tom, Old Tom and Young Tom, and I don't like it. It would be different if we wanted to carry down the name for any special reason; if it were an historic family name or something like that."

To Tom's bewildered arguments, she merely replied, "But you don't understand! That's just why I *don't* want him named that, because it *is* so ordinary."

It was very easy for Tom Dodge to admit then that Emily was right. He looked at her tenderly with a rising lump in his throat. Her hair was smoothed back from her forehead and lay loose on the pillow, soft brown hair and wavy. Pretty like that, when it wasn't twisted into a tight, ugly pug. The lines of her thin, rather bony cheeks were strangely softened, and there were dark shadows under her eyes.

"I was only fooling," he assured her, clumsily patting the bedclothes around her, and suddenly rising and pressing his lips to hers. "Name him anything you like, darling." It was one of the few times he ever called her darling. One didn't, as a rule, say such things to Emily."

The boy was named Malcolm Wordsworth Dodge. Malcolm, because Emily liked it; and Wordsworth, to fill in. Besides, it gave a dignified touch.

Not so easy to yield, however, when he discovered there would never be any "Thomas A. Dodge & Son,"

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over his store window and no use for his treasured stationery.

Nevertheless, the logic of the case was clearly with Emily. In the face of the brief she presented, he was helpless. What could he say when she declared that it was selfishness for a man to insist that his son follow in the same business! "Where would all our great artists, our poets, our singers be," she declared, "if they had remained blacksmiths, cobblers, and farmers, like their fathers!"

"But Sonny ain't going to be one of them, is he?" he asked dubiously.

"I knew the point would go right over your head," Emily retorted sarcastically; "but the fact is, I want Malcolm to be free to live his own life and choose just what he wants to do. I don't want him to be tied down to a small-town store all his life. What have you to offer him, anyway?" This scoffingly.

"It's a good little business," he answered in meek defense. "Our house is clear; I've got enough in the bank for Sonny's education and our old age; I've got three clerks at the store now, and I was a-thinking of opening a branch store in South Weston and letting Sonny be manager there when he grows up."

This was his dream, his cause, which gave glory to each day's humdrum, tiresome toil. He had never told anyone about it before. He looked at Emily eagerly, hopefully. Surely this was something to offer!

"A branch manager of a hardware store!" she exploded harshly. "A wonderful future. I'd rather have him anything else. You never seem to understand!"

The darts had reached their goal. They could go no farther. Tom Dodge ceased dreaming about that store in South Weston. Thereafter he left the boy entirely to Emily. It was she who worked with him or "for" him on his lessons, as Tom often thought; she who pushed him through the grade schools and the high school; she who won the valedictory for him; and when he was sixteen it was she who sent him off to college.

She had never let him "hang around" the store, after he announced one day that he was going to run a store like Dad and make a lot of money.

"Now you see the notion you've put in that child's head," Emily said irritably, "by letting him stay there and watch you. Hereafter, you send him home."

As the boy grew older his father was even rather afraid of him. He wondered if Sonny would learn to take Emily's attitude. When he was educated as his mother was—for Emily had her diploma from the state normal school right on the parlor wall—would he be superior and say, "Oh, Dad, you don't understand!" Probably. Tom Dodge shuddered.

He never went to the station to see the boy off to college. Emily went, and he felt there would be no need of him. He merely shook hands with his son before he left for the store, turned his head away to conceal the shaking of his lips, and muttered something about "good luck."

He actually dreaded to see Sonny when he came home Christmas. He had seen boys come home before with their new clothes and their new mannerisms, their eagerness to impress the town boys and girls

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with their cleverness, and their elders with their superiority of intellect.

Sonny came. Yes, there was a change, but a disconcerting one. Malcolm was thinner, older, less boyish, and more reserved. His father wished he had returned the blatant young billy goat he had feared to see. One thing above all puzzled him—the boy spent every spare moment in the store.

Tom Dodge grew younger in the days the boy was there, poking into cases, asking where this thing was kept and where that; what was the price of this; did people ask for many of these jiggers now; what were they for; what did he sell most of, and why; was trade steady, and what were his biggest months?

Once, in a burst of confidence, he told his son about the branch store in South Weston. The boy's eyes widened. "Gosh, that would be great!" he exclaimed. "When you going to do it?"

The glow suddenly died out of his father's face. "Oh, I dunno; maybe never," he answered dully. "Jest a pipe-dream of mine." He remembered what Emily had said about putting notions into the boy's head. Then one day, toward the end of the recess, Malcolm urged his father to go for a walk. "They won't need you at the store," he said eagerly, "come along."

Tom Dodge didn't believe he had ever been so happy—he over fifty, and this son walking at his side. He was vaguely ill at ease, though. Why should the boy prefer to go with him when he might have gone to call on Mr. Holcombe with Emily? Emily and Mr. Holcombe could talk so awesomely on books.

Tom Dodge, he who said "ain't" and "lay down" with deplorable indifference, couldn't talk at all.

Yet Malcolm did not wish to talk. Not until they were free from the town, striding over the hills, did he speak. Then he said nervously, "Dad, I asked you to come, 'cause I got to ask you some questions." His lips quivered as his father cheerfully replied, "Shoot ahead, Sonny."

Stammeringly he asked them—questions about drinking a little just for fun, as lots of fellows did; of breaking rules; of going to the theatre with girls one met on the street, girls who wouldn't be called nice in Weston, girls who thought a fellow was the worst kind of a ham if he didn't kiss them good-night.

Tom had a longing to grip his son by the shoulders and declare fiercely, "You're going to stay home with me!" But he didn't. Instead, he answered the questions—clumsily he knew; and was rewarded by the light of admiration which flooded the boy's face.

"Did you say anything to your mother?" he asked. Emily could have done so much better than he!

"No," Malcolm replied; "I thought I'd rather ask you."

Tom Dodge, over fifty, shied a stone at a cow. The boy had come to him!

Emily was getting nervous.

"It's high time we heard from Malcolm," she announced at dinner a few days following the despatching of her letter. "Of course he won't know his marks yet, but the exams must be nearly over, and he prob-

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ably has a pretty good idea how he came out."

"Oh, we'll hear from Sonny in time," Tom replied slowly. He had just met that Holcombe man and had been rather curt when the latter had said, "We're expecting to receive a splendid report from your son, Mr. Dodge." Tom didn't like the way the principal said "Mister." It was as if the man were consciously trying to elevate him to Emily's level.

Two days later when no letter came, Emily was both worried and angry. "Malcolm knows how much I am thinking of him," she said plaintively. "I should think he'd write."

How much *she* was thinking of him! A sad smile came for an instant on the man's lips. For days, even nights, past, had he not been praying? The prayer wasn't very eloquently phrased, it is true, running something like: "O God . . . those old exams . . . Sonny's only a kid . . . they hadn't ought to expect so much of him . . . Make him pass 'em . . . if you can. . . ."

Of course when the boy did write, it would be to Emily. It always was. Nevertheless, there was one thing his, and his alone, the memory of that Christmas vacation only a few months past, and that walk in the fields.

That night they went to prayer meeting and on their return Emily said, "Certainly a letter ought to have come to-night. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if Jo got the mail and left it in the store. Let's stop in and see."

"I don't think you'll find any," Tom replied; "but we'll go in."

As he fumbled for the switch in the darkness of the store, he suddenly became rigidly erect, gripped his wife and thrust her to one side. He had seen the play of a flashlight in his office and the vague outline of a hunched form.

"Hands up in there!" he boomed in a voice Emily Dodge had never heard before, a voice which made her creep tremblingly nearer that broad protecting back.

His command was but a bluff. He had no revolver; but seizing a garden trowel and motioning his wife to remain where she was, he strode forward, hand upraised, prepared to deal the first blow.

He entered and the trowel fell to the floor. "Sonny!" he exclaimed in an agonized whisper.

The boy, a slender, childish figure, with soft blond hair and wistful blue eyes, strangely like those of Tom Dodge, turned a white, frightened face.

"Oh, Dad," he cried.

Later, as they sat around the kitchen stove, Malcolm, with his father's arm on his shoulder, told them. It was a long time before he could talk, and Emily with a curiously humble feeling watched Tom as he gently, kindly, but firmly insisted upon a complete recital. At first she had commenced to besiege Malcolm with a volley of questions, sharp, crisp questions, but Tom had sternly asked her to be silent.

"I didn't cheat, I didn't cheat," he sobbed repeatedly; "I was going to, but I didn't."

"Of course you didn't," Tom agreed, patting the boy's quivering shoulder reassuringly. "Now just you go ahead and tell us all about it."

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Malcolm raised a tear-stained face, and Emily winced as she realized that he looked only at his father. From the first moment in the store, when he had looked at her with staring, frightened eyes, he had apparently not noticed her.

She swallowed and gripped her chair. She knew now that Malcolm had not passed with honors, that he might even be in disgrace, yet strangely she did not care. He was her baby and he was in trouble.

"I tried awfully hard," he went on pleadingly; "but it wasn't the same up there as it was in high school. I never realized Ma had done so much of my work"—Emily lowered her head; "then the fellows made so much fun of me," he said bitterly, "called me the infant, and asked me when I got out of kindergarten. It's all right if you're young and smart, but when you're a dumb-bell, it's fierce. They don't want you to go around with 'em—and it's kind of lonesome.

"I thought if I managed to pass, it would be all right, 'cause I could flunk two things and still stay. I didn't see how I could get by Latin and Math.; but I was sure if I worked hard I could get by the others, so I studied every minute and was feeling sort of pleased. . . . Then the night before the exams I got Ma's letter and Mr. Holcombe's and—" his voice broke; "honest," he said, "I suppose I was a coward, but they just . . . they—"

Tom saw the agony in Emily's eyes and thought to spare her all he could. "They just took all the learnin' out of your head and all the insides out of your stum-

mick," he said quickly, with a poor attempt at joviality.

The boy smiled wanly. "That's just it," he agreed. "I guess I lost my head then, for I couldn't study, and I decided I'd have to cheat to get the marks I ought to get. So I wrote all the stuff out on paper and put it in my pocket."

Tom Dodge's lips grew gray and he gripped his son's shoulder tightly. "But you didn't use 'em, Sonny?" he said slowly.

The boy shook his head. "I was going to," he said; "but just before I went to the hall, I got your letter, and—"

"Your father wrote you!" Emily interrupted in amazement.

"Yep, and he sent me a five-pound box of candy," the boy said eagerly, turning to his mother for a moment. "After that, I couldn't cheat," he declared with a long breath, "'cause I knew you wouldn't be with me in that, Dad!"

"I don't know how I came out," he concluded falteringly. "I don't think I passed enough to stay, even. Somehow I forgot all I knew. I stuck around there for a day after they were over, then I came here. . . . By the way, Dad, you want to fix that cellar window, it would be a cinch for anyone to break in. . . . I thought I'd sleep in the office and see Dad in the morning. Then I was going away, 'cause I couldn't very well come home when everybody expected I'd come off with honors. I—I thought maybe Dad would understand."

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"I understand!" cried Emily Dodge in what was almost a frenzied plea for mercy. Rushing forward, she knelt at her son's side and enveloped him in her arms. She had borne all the punishment she could stand. He had planned to run away, her boy, and had not meant to see her!

Stroking his hair, his face, gripping his arms, she wept with an abandonment that was alarming to her husband.

"Emily, Emily," he begged soothingly, "don't cry so. Everything's all right. Please don't, darling!" It was one of the few times he ever called Emily that.

The boy, too, was visibly disturbed. "I'm sorry I can't be as smart as you want me to be," he said, hugging her; "but I'll go back and try again if you want me to."

"You're just as I want you to be," she said fiercely. "And you won't go back. You'll stay right home with me and your father."

The boy's eyes grew wide. "Honest," he exclaimed. "Stay at home and go in the store!"

Tom Dodge looked at Emily. No, she would not wish him to do that. She would probably have something else in view for him.

"Of course," replied Emily quickly. "Your father needs you. He's thinking of opening a branch store in South Weston one of these days."

## ASK ANY FATHER \*

*William Dudley Pelley*

A HEAVY rubber-tired hack, drawn by black horses, turned into a Vermont town side street in early autumn dusk.

Along under naked maples it rumbled, jounced ponderously on cross-walks, broke through brittle surface ice on tops of puddles, to halt before a non-descript two-story house where the street ran out in pasture.

A door of this vehicle opened. A young man descended.

He did not step down as though expecting anyone in the house to receive him. He alighted and closed the hack door dully, impersonally. The bewhiskered old driver looked down in compassion.

"Anything special I can do for you, Calvin? I know how hard to-night'll be. Been through a couple such nights m'self."

"No, no, Mr. Fodder. I'll be all right. Just send your bill when you get around to it—"

"Pshaw, you don't pay me nothin'. It's all included in Blake Whipple's bill. Sure there ain't nothin' I can do for you, Calvin?"

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"No, no. You've been mighty kind, Mr. Fodder. Everybody's been kind. It's just up to me to pull myself together and start all over."

"I s'pose so, Calvin. Well, you got my sympathy, such as it's worth." And the driver tightened his reins, spoke to his horses, and swung the hack in a graceful circle. A moment later it had gone down the street.

Left alone in autumnal quiet, the young man stared at the house. The down-stairs tenement appeared unoccupied; its shutters were closed. An upper kitchen window at the rear showed a light, but the structure had a forsaken aspect, and the young man shivered—as though he and the domicile had much in common.

A sharp-featured woman with rusty gray hair and work-gnarled hands turned with nervous solicitation at the young man's entrance. He came into that upper kitchen with an expression on his face not of weariness but of *age*.

"My stars," she cried, "is it over so quick?" She wore a bluish house dress and red worsted shawl. Any community of the nation would quickly identify her as "a neighbor."

"Why not, Mrs. Thurston? What was there about it that should take any time? Where's the boy?"

"Sleepin' in the sitting-room."

"Well, I don't want to trouble you any more, Mrs. Thurston. Your own husband will be coming home and wanting his supper. We'll get along all right."

"But I ain't got your baby's food—"

"I'll look after it, Mrs. Thurston."

"But you're goin' to get a woman in, ain't you? Somebody's got to look after this place. You can't keep to your work in the mill and leave a little baby."

"Yes. . . . I suppose so. To tell you the truth, I hadn't thought that far ahead. I don't know yet just what I will do."

"Most men in your fix would board the baby out."

"Board him *out!*!" The young man turned in the act of pulling off his overcoat. His mouth tightened harder. "If anybody's going to take care of Davy from now on, it's going to be *me!*"

"You mean you're goin' to keep up this home an' everything?"

"But there's nothing else I can do. . . . There's nothing else I want to do. I'll find someone who'll come in and stay through the days. As for the nights—I'm glad I've got him. . . . Davy, I mean. I don't know what I'd do without him. Never mind how he turns out, Mrs. Thurston, he'll always stand for one year of absolute happiness in my life. Never mind what other years ahead may bring, the one year that's passed will always be . . . sacred."

Tears filled the man's eyes then as he turned to hang up his coat. They got into his voice, so he said no more. But as he started for the sitting-room door, Mrs. Thurston—who had reached for her hat—cast it from her impulsively.

"John Thurston can get his own supper. I'm stayin' right here until you feel better. I guess I know my duty when I see it. I'll get you some vittles and you're goin' to eat 'em." Saying which, to hide her own

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emotion the good woman began pushing and shoving stew-pans and kettles vigorously about on the stove top.

The man went into the sitting-room. A shadeless oil lamp, its wick turned low, burned on a shelf between two windows. Its dim light revealed the location of a baby's crib between the center table and a sewing machine—now forever quiet.

He reached for the lamp and set it down on the table. He pulled a chair alongside the crib. He sank in this chair, bent over with elbows on his knees. Mutely he studied his child.

It lay on its side, face toward its father. Faintly, regularly, came the breath from its tiny lungs. Toy-like hands with small pink fingers curled—were clasped before its face—tender, fragile hands, absurdly weak to grapple with ruthless adversaries in the years which stretched ahead. Out from under the flannel blanket had been thrust one chubby foot.

The wobbly pinkish head, the contour of eyebrows and features, the tiny damp eyelids, the rosebud lips, the small moist chin, these the man saw as through a mist. And the interrogation written large upon those baby features, even in slumber, he tried in dumb anguish to answer from his own hard knowledge of the world and Life.

Calvin Peck spoke scarcely a word, not even a whisper, in the sitting-room with his son that night, while the Thurston woman prepared his supper. But the thoughts that he thought were long, long thoughts. . . .

A comradeship existed now between this sleeping

infant and himself which had not existed hitherto. There was no bitterness in the man's heart for what had happened; only a deep, unspeakable, overwhelming gratitude that in the aftermath of the tragedy there was one who shared it, even though years and years must pass before the child came to realize the burden it had borne.

Springs, summers, autumns, winters—season upon season, year upon year—these stretched ahead for the sleeping boy. Days of happiness and nights of heart-break; weeks of delirious anticipation; months of cruel disillusion; interludes of hope; periods of triumph; hours in Gethsemane—God has decreed that Everyman shall know them.

So Everyman sees in his boy the mirror of himself: his own trials, his own testings; his own aspirations, his ambitions, his winnings, and, alas, many times, his Calvaries. And Calvin Peck, in the greatest Calvary of his life, projected much of his own life ahead for his son, and was mellow with thankfulness that he was privileged to be the one to walk beside the lad and point Life out to him . . . “as rivers that water the woodland, darkened by shadows of earth, yet reflecting an image of heaven.”

His boy must be something finer and better than *he* had been, or would ever be. In the son all the unvoiced urges and aspirations of the father's heart must flower. As the lad attained manhood, he must stand forth for what the father Might Have Been—and for that attainment the father stood ready to pay all the costs.

It was a Saturday afternoon in June, the year that

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little David Peck reached fourteen, however, before the first real intimation of what might lie in store for both of them came to the man who on that empty November night had made his sleeping son a promise.

The firm of Prentiss and Sibley had lately merged with the Thorne Knitting Mills, and Calvin's prospects were looking up. Hard work had raised him to be plant superintendent.

Yet it was *only* plant superintendent. Fifteen years of his early maturity had gone, and he filled no greater niche in the universal scheme of things than overseeing the manufacture of twenty gross of union suits each day up in a mountain-locked little New England town.

The man was tired. Spring hillsides were calling. Something higher and finer and better in earthly existence was calling, something that would feed his soul, lift him from an environment of crass machinery and flashing needles up onto a social stratum ". . . where calm-eyed people walked the summits of life, and the east was ever a sunrise."

David came into the room.

He had grown into a sandy-haired, blue-eyed, sturdily-built youngster, with omnipresent grin and two ready fists. Calvin was increasingly proud of him. He was *all man*. And yet there had been times when the father wondered if he had not erred in giving him no foster-mother, who might have supplied a feminine touch to the lad's character and impregnated his subconscious with a sense of the delicate and beautiful.

"Boy," proposed the father, "let's take the after-

noon off and go for a stroll in the hills. I want to talk to you—”

“Aw, hake, I don’t wanna go walkin’ over hills! I gotta date to go down the river. A lot of us kids are makin’ a dandy water-wheel over on the East Fork.”

“A water-wheel!”

“Yeah. An’ it works swell. . . . You oughta come an’ see it!”

“I’ll be glad to come and look it over, son,” the man agreed.

After all, his suggestion of the walk in the country had really been to get acquainted with his son—or to stay acquainted with him—despite the time his work demanded. Perhaps he could maintain that camaraderie in inspecting water-wheels as well as in watching butterflies or reading extracts from the classics.

Calvin went and looked at the water-wheel, and came away later thinking moodily. He had every reason to be proud of his son’s mechanical turn of mind, and yet in another way it seemed so sordid. It seemed sordid to him because it must lead only to an existence in maturity circumscribed even as the father’s had been circumscribed.

Calvin felt that he had sold his life to cogs and wheels and spinning-bobbins—which epitomized manufactured products necessary to earthly life perhaps, but which assayed down at last to not much more than the making of money. Water-wheels belonged with these. They were things rendered unto Cæsar; whereas, deep in his intimate heart, the

father had a blind, throbbing ache to have the lad for whom he was slaving render unto God—

Still, Calvin was too wise a parent not to be grateful that his son was showing any proclivities at all. He would not consent to David's leaving school when other boys took jobs at fourteen to help support families or to earn their own spending money. If he were mechanically minded, the father was cheerfully willing that the lad should go through technical college and perchance become an engineer.

*But to become something outside and above the Great Middle Class was the thing!*

Then, in the youngster's nineteenth year, like a bolt from the blue, came an episode which the town, as a town, has not ceased to talk about on occasion, even down to the present.

Calvin had worked late at the mill one night, supervising the installation of new machinery. David's hysterical phone call implored his presence at home. As he opened the front door the son stole fearfully down the stairs to meet him.

"Dad, you come through town, didn't you? Did you . . . hear anything?"

Calvin hooked his cheap straw hat mechanically on the hall tree. A presentiment came to him that he was about to pass through one of life's great crucibles.

"What was there to hear, my son?" he asked.

The son averted his glance. His face was deathly pale. He began walking the lower hall with hands thrust deep in his trousers pockets. His hair was awry. Dried blood smeared his lip.

"Dad, I gotta have some money—quick! I gotta get out of this place. If you won't gimme some dough, I gotta hop the Boston freight."

"In God's name, son, what's happened?"

Tears swelled into the lad's eyes then, and with a great heart wrench the father saw him as still the motherless young tad who had not yet learned to sidestep earth's pitfalls, who . . . perhaps, had already plunged down one of them.

"I gotta get out o' this place—to-night!"

"What have you done? Out with it! *Everything!*"

"It wasn't my fault, Dad. I swear it wasn't my fault. B-b-but—I got into a fight—on Cross Street—with Mickey Blodgett."

"You got in a fight over what?"

"It—it—was over a skirt, Dad. A girl. I laid Mickey out c-c-cold."

Calvin reached for his boy and gripped him. "You laid him out cold!"

"He never . . . moved, Dad . . . after I biffed him."

"Great heavens, you haven't done *murder?*"

"I don't know, Dad. I just gotta get out of this place, that's all. I gotta—"

"Over a girl, you say? What girl?"

"Lizzie Taro."

Calvin reeled. Poor little Lizzie Taro, slovenly daughter of the town's worst drunkard—his boy had fought a man for *her*. But his face grew strong:

"See here, son. If you're a lad of mine there'll be no running away. You'll stay right here, and face the music—if there's going to be music."

"I can't, Dad, I can't! I picked the fight. I struck him first—"

"Never mind. Stay, and face it. If you're responsible, all I own will go toward making your punishment light. If you're not, they can't punish you at all. But as for running, like a craven coward—"

"I'm not a coward. But I'm in dutch with the bunch at the Process Works—Mickey's friends. They'll swear I—"

Voices were heard outside in the street. They came nearer—into the yard. Heavy footsteps on the hollow veranda followed. The voices of many persons—abrupt, ear-splitting knocks like thumps on a coffin—these Calvin heard as in a daze. He moved toward the door, recognizing the demands of Chief Hogan.

In that instant David ascended the stairs—three at a time.

"Mickey's not dead, Mr. Peck," the officer subsequently announced when the door had been opened upon a group of ugly-faced men. "But I'll have to take the boy for assault and battery."

"David!" cried the father, calling up the stairs.

No David answered. The boy had sped through the upper hall and into his bedroom. Locking the door, he had fled by a window, down over the roof of the porch.

They never caught David Peck.

When house and neighborhood were finally quieted, Calvin went to his room.

It was a peaceful August night. The valley was flooded with moonshine. The father walked to the south window and stood looking out upon the sleep-

ing countryside, where the tree toads were trilling and the stars were very high. . . .

"God in heaven," he begged brokenly, "where have I erred? I dreamed so much—and it's come to this!"

Soft breezes of evening wafted the curtains. A switching engine coughed faintly on the other side of town. The world was dreamy and old—and sadly beautiful.

To the man in those moments came memories of another night, back across the years, when he had studied a sleeping boy-child lying on his side in a homemade crib—toylike hands and exquisite fingers clasped together before his face, absurdly weak then to grapple with ruthless adversaries in the world ahead.

Now, somewhere out across those moonlit miles, that same son might be clinging with death grip to the truss rods of a hurtling, rocking, thundering freight, in horrible peril of mangling beneath the shrieking wheels. Calvin gripped the lowered window sash in the agony of his despair.

That night was his real Gethsemane, the final Gethsemane of every parent. No matter how watchful the care, how great the solicitude, how overwhelming the advantages and opportunities and enticements and awards that have followed a lad through boyhood, inexorably come those years when the passions of a man are unleashed, while his body is still controlled by the judgment of a little child. Those are the anxious years, in which the parent may do nothing—except to suffer and pray, and dare to hope that God is in His heaven.

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"Into Your hands I deliver him," Calvin whispered huskily, eyes closed. "Keep him and watch over him. I've done my best. You too have been a father. You can understand."

Calvin's hair whitened almost in a night. *That night!*

In the week which followed, he went to old Jim Thorne. "I'm quitting the business, Jim," said he. "I've had enough."

"You're quittin' the business! What you aimin' to do, start on a hunt for your kid?"

"The world's too wide, Jim. I wouldn't know where to look. Besides, what could I do that I haven't done already? The boy's different from me. It seems almost as though our paths were meant to separate from the first. And perhaps it's on the Books that such an experience is exactly what Dave needs to show him what a father really means in his life."

"What you going to do with yourself? You can't hang 'round and mope."

"I don't intend to mope, at least more than I can help. I've got quite a little money saved that was going to pay for Dave's college education. Seeing he's never given a rap for a college education, I guess it's all right for me to buy a few things I've always hungered for for myself—without exactly knowing how much I hungered for them."

"What, for instance?"

"Books. A few pictures. The right kind of a house to keep them in, where I can properly enjoy them. There's a lot of reading I've wanted all my life to do, and never had the time: geology, biology, law, travel.

I'm not exactly what you'd call artistic. But there are lots of things that trim life and make it worth living that I've never had time to do. Now my anvils and millstones have sort of dropped away. I figure I can do it with a clear conscience."

"Ain't gonna leave town, be you, Calvin?"

"No, no, I love these Green Mountains too much. Think I'll buy the Winship house out on the Bryant's Corners road, and for a sort of work go into another thing I've always wished I could follow up—dogs."

"Dogs! Whatta you mean?"

"Raise 'em. Setters. I had one once, years ago. He lost his life saving the life of a little child. I've never gotten over my love for the breed. Maybe you could call it a sort of monument to that dog's memory if I went in for a kennel."

Jim Thorne sat in thought a long time after Calvin had left him. "Poor Cal," the mill man sighed. "Wife and boy both gone, and he just wants somethin' to love . . . that'll love him back. So he turns to dogs. Well, well. Lots o' worse things a man could love than a dog!"

The ex-superintendent of the local knitting mills did buy the Winship place; he got a housekeeper to go out there with him, erected some outbuildings, bought two fine Gordons, settled down to live as best he could in his new incarnation. And tried to forget.

But where is the man who can successfully forget a son if that boy be still living?

The boyhood dreams that he had watched on the face of his growing youngster, wonderings at the

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phenomenon of the universe as it unfolds before him, the tragedies of childhood and the heartburns of adolescence as they came with the years, memories of small tightly set lips when pain of body or soul was borne stoically, because stoicism is the first attribute of a man, days when the father had tried in mute anguish to get close to the soul of his lad, and made the discovery that they were two different persons—how many hours the man lived these over while his eyes were mechanically fixed on his handiwork of the moment!

Nights came also when he thought of his son battling the world alone, and awoke to fancy he had heard wild, pitiful cries: "Father! Father!" coming as from a little boy lost in the tortuous immensities of a desert. And the father could not respond, because he could not tell whence the boy was calling. What man could forget?

For David stayed away. He might have lost his clutch on the truss rods of that Boston freight and been mangled beneath its wheels that August night, for all the father knew. Having little in common with Calvin temperamentally, and fleeing Vermont under the onus of what he assumed to have been a tragedy—communication with the father meaning apprehension—David's silence was not unnatural. For over ten years Calvin Peck had no son.

In an austere little white house with red blinds out on the Crossing Road he lived—a well-kept little house up on a walled banking behind some maples. Out behind an equally trim white barn were some puppy runs; he also cultivated an enormous raspberry gar-

. by . WILLIAM DUDLEY PELLEY .

den and went in for several hives of bees. Townspeople driving past the place on many an afternoon beheld his solitary figure at labor off in a corner of his premises—a tallish, dignified, slow-moving man, who seemed always communing with himself, and who came into town only to pay monthly bills or to vote. If he went about the country he drove a sorrel mare hitched to a piano-box buggy, the rig possessing much individuality because the mare never required a mouthbit, being guided by reins hitched to a bridle that was little more than a halter.

People would jerk thumbs at him and explain to strangers, "Oh, that's Calvin Peck! He retired pretty well fixed; but his boy got into some sort of scrape a few years back and left home. Some say the kid's dead, but no one knows for certain. Want to buy a good setter? He'll sell you one cheap. And the more you like dogs, the cheaper you'll get one!"

Then came a morning when the rural free delivery buggy drove up to the aluminum-painted post box out front of the Peck house, and when Calvin came in from the south lot for his dinner the Widow Thurston called attention to his letters.

Calvin put his steel spectacles over his ears, sorted out his farm, bee, and dog papers, finally opened a long envelope to draw out a letter sheet with—

The Crampton Corporation Ships  
Crampton, N. J.

lithographed across the top.

Through the open door from the kitchen the house-

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keeper caught sight of him, standing a long time by one of the sitting-room windows. The sheet hung listlessly from his hand.

"What's the matter?" she demanded.

"Matter?" he said thickly. "Nothing special, only . . . I've heard from David!"

The woman took the sheet he proffered. Salient sentences stood out in high light—

. . . Accidentally I met Bill Stevens from the old home town the other day, Dad, down here to get a job with our engineers . . . he told me Mickey recovered from our fight . . . that I ran off for nothing! Well, that's that! . . . I never let on to you where I went, because the wrong people might read the letter and lug me back. Besides, I got married and had a kid of my own. You know how it is. . . . You've been a grandpop for quite a spell and never knew it. . . .

. . . after a fashion I've forged ahead a bit. I landed with this company and they've been good to me, though of course it wasn't from charity. . . . I took one of those correspondence school courses nights, and last fall they made me hull boss. . . . I know we don't seem to have a whole lot in common, except that we're son and father, but I'd like to see you. . . . As I can't spare time off the job just now, and you may be lonely up there, why not come down and visit us a spell and see the kid? . . .

Calvin went.

Crampton was the ugliest of ugly manufacturing towns sprawled along the mudflat Jersey shore. Refuse and ashheaps littered its streets; low-browed, big-bodied, small-headed men and squalling children lived in tawdry, unpainted frame houses kept by shapeless women.

The yards where Calvin found his boy were a pandemonium of profanity, shriekings, rivetings, whistlings, scrapage, and bewildering clutter. When the father recognized his son, his sight wavered. . . .

In physique and culture the boy, mangrown, resembled one of those allegorical human subjects which mural painters depict on the ceilings of labor temples. His jaw was heavy, his mouth was large, he needed a hair-cut and a shave. Denim clothes were befouled with oil, muck, and creosote paint; he wore a thin cambric cap twisted over one ear. Before greeting his father he rubbed a leatheren paw on the leg of his overalls.

"Hello, Dad," he worded it, "how's every little old thing up at Paris?" And he grinned.

It was the same friendly, good-natured grin of the two-fisted youngster, back over the years, who had scoffed at a walk over New England mountains.

"Boy, boy!" cried the father brokenly. He followed his son to a small shanty office, with foul-odored bilge lapping beneath its pilings.

"Make yourself at home, Dad. We're slidin' the hull of the 'Gigantic' into the water to-morrow. When I see the bunch have got enough work to keep 'em sweatin', I'll be back, and we'll chin!"

David kicked an unclean cuspidor aside and shoved out a broken chair for his father. Then almost at once he was gone, out in the cluttered turmoil.

The stench of the bilge and coal-reek nauseated Calvin at first. His sensibilities resented the crudities, the ugliness, the brutality, the labor-lust that hammered and dinned profits, profits, profits! Back over

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the years they took him, to the mill incarnation he had tried to outgrow—that he had wanted his boy to rise above, even as he had always longed to get above it. Yet here was the son, a man at last, and immersed in ten thousand times the things that were Cæsar's!

Calvin studied his sleeping grandson's face that night—toylike hands clasped together, breath coming gently from tiny lungs—and many years dissolved in a moment. David entered while the ex-superintendent of the Thorne Knitting Mills was living another scene, upon another night, beside another crib.

"Gonna make a ship-builder of him, Dad. That's he-man's work!"

"Mebbe, son," Calvin answered huskily. Then, with a trace of whimsy, "And he'll probably show you that God's intended him for a preacher, or a writer, or an artist!"

So this was the reunion: David gone back to his labor to see that all was progressing satisfactorily for the morrow's launching, the wisp of a woman David had married departed with women friends to a movie, the baby in charge of a nurse, and old Calvin left with his dreams of What He Had Hoped Would Be.

One year and twenty months elapsed before old Calvin was shown the light.

It was a gray afternoon in November. Calvin had come down again from Vermont to be with his son's family for the Thanksgiving holiday. He unlocked the mooring chains of David's powerful launch, threw them aside, climbed aboard, started the doughty engine and headed away from the nondescript dock.

Down along the Jersey shore and out into incipient winter's dusk he steered.

He did not know where he was going. Open reaches of ocean called him. Speaking solitudes of salty horizons tuned in with long, long thoughts of youth and young-manhood. The dull, sunless sky, too, held a melancholy relationship with the Grail of Disappointment, in quest of which, he felt, he had spent his years.

He felt that he had neither part nor place in the grubbing, sweating, shrieking world of crass commercialism which claimed and satisfied his boy. And the afternoon softened into leaden gray. Mauve shadows of twilight descended. The sun came out for a lingering instant, a mammoth blob of molten scarlet hung behind bars of leaden gray. Then it was gone. The air grew colder. There were wisps of snow in the sea wind blowing landward.

Calvin silenced his engine. The launch rocked groggily and the lone man rocked with it. Like human existence, that rocking.

A ship was coming up the bay in chill November dusk, an ocean liner in from Europe, striving to make port before the lashing of the off-shore storm.

Earlier that afternoon, Calvin had seen the health officer's tug head down toward quarantine, as he had idled with his pipe along the docks. Now the vessel had picked up doctor and pilot. She would come close to the rocking launch, but not so close that the little craft would be in danger of collision. Calvin fell to watching the ship as she made the harbor's shelter.

She was a mammoth boat, and as she drew nearer

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the size of her magnified. What a sight to catch on canvas, that raw November night as she neared the land, dull black sides ice-coated by the freezing outer seas! Old Calvin was too much the artist not to grasp the cold, huge beauty of her. . . .

Bellowing hoarsely for smaller craft to clear the way, on she came up the harbor with funnels billowing pitchy smoke, whistles shrieking, tugs striving to keep up and render puny aid, streams of sewage spewing from her mighty vitals, thundering chutes disgorging sacks of fast oceanic mail.

"Oh, you beautiful monster!" cried the old man thickly. "If I could only paint you . . . catch the glory and power of you! If I could only paint your virility!"

But even his thoughts were smothered by the ear-piercing sirens, the mad foaming of the cleft waters at her prow. Beside her the launch was becoming an egg-shell, accentuating the liner's mountainous tonnage.

Through the gales of wintry seas she had smashed her pathway. Through winds that shrieked and waters that arose like granite masses to annihilate her, she had rammed a defiant track. She had mocked at the sleet-lashed ocean, and her fight-loving heart had thrilled with the combat. Now she was nearing land. She was coming into port.

The liner was almost abreast of old Calvin now. Up there—far, far up above the puny launch rocking in the whitecaps—up within her heroic iron sides, carried as faithfully and as tenderly as in the arms of a mighty mother, were men and women and little chil-

dren. There were parents coming from the Old World to find sons and daughters in the New. Wives were soon to join husbands. Sweethearts were again to know the embrace of lovers' arms.

Babies had played on her saloon floors through the monotonous hours of that comfortable voyage—without thought or care of the mighty battle that ship was waging to get them safely through. Five thousand human souls were aboard this towering, victorious hulk of steel and snow and ice—warm, well-fed poignantly anticipant of reunions to take place shortly at the dock.

Like a thing alive, she rode majestically, triumphantly up the harbor, her speed slowly dying. Grimly, with adamant beauty, the glory of annihilating strength tempered with infinite tenderness, she seemed to acclaim :

“I have brought them to you. Over the reaches of three thousand miles of water I have carried them: your parents, your children, your lovers. I have them here for you in safety. But I want no credit. Such is my life, my business, my privilege. For this was I created.”

Mistress of distance, buffeted but invincible, confident of playing the same gruff game with death times beyond recount—of holding resolutely to her course and making in the twilight the harbor for which she had started in the morning of her voyage—the panting, spewing, unconquerable leviathan came nearer and nearer old Calvin’s launch. Lights streamed from five decks and two thousand porthole windows. Groups of sailors raced backward and forward, unleashing

her winches, prying up her hatches, attending to the details of a voyage that was nearly done. More tooting, eager tugs, hungry for spoils, churned forward to offer their assistance. A seething searchlight played on her bow from an offstanding revenue cutter. . . .

Far down on the left, just out of harm's way, a little, old, gray-haired mill superintendent in a rocking motor-boat raised his lackluster eyes to that bow. He uttered a cry which no man heard. For in the glory brilliance of two more searchlights, great gold letters stood out like scintillating beacons—

### The Gigantic

"Why, that's a Crampton boat!" old Calvin gasped. "It's the ship they launched the day after I got here. Merciful God! . . . That's my boy's ship! . . . my little son Davy. *He made it!*"

It was David's boat. The little son who had chosen to experiment with water-wheels instead of walking over the hills looking at butterflies—he had done his part toward creating this mighty thing that was rolling past the throat-choked father now, as high as the stars, vibrating all that harbor world. David the ship-builder, the man-master . . . his little sleeping baby-son of the New England sitting-room crib, three decades in the past. His boy David had become as the god who had fashioned this abysmal thing and breathed into its nostrils the throbbing breath of life.

And this was the anthem and the glory which welled louder and higher in old Calvin's artist-heart until it pierced the canopy of harbor clouds and reached the stars.

On that far-off night the bereaved young father had studied his sleeping child, and wondered: "What will you become when you have grown a man, little chap? What losses or victories will come to you on the world's great battlefield of labor?"

Would that the father could have heard a response: "I'll build mighty ocean liners that will fight a track from continent to continent, connecting the hemispheres, bridging the worlds! Iron and steel, and science and brawn, beneath my shaping, shall mock at the mightiest forces of nature. The world will draw closer together, human life become a finer, better, higher thing because of this industry to which I shall sell my life and my soul!"

As the stupendous creation of his boy—and a thousand other men's boys—floated onward and up to her dock, Calvin read, as on tablets of bronze:

*"The parent who knows he has done his best may leave the rest to the Father of fathers!"*

A glory light flooded into the secret recesses of Calvin Peck's soul and lifted him with that realization up into the hill of the Lord, wherein is thanksgiving and a plenteous peace.

## PACK HORSE \*

*Sophie Kerr*

THERE had been a protracted argument between the parents about the name of Ross and Dora Wyllie's first child. Ross wanted to name her Jane, after his grandmother, whom he had adored. Dora wanted to name her Vera, after a Russian grand duchess whose picture she had seen in a Sunday paper. They compromised, if you can call it that, on Genevieve—which became, in the baby's own special language, Veevee, and continued to be Veevee long after her baby talk was outgrown. Ross Wyllie took a lot of comfort in looking at his daughter. Usually he called her Janie, pretending that it was the proper nickname for Genevieve.

The next child was a boy and became Ross Wyllie, Jr., because Mrs. Wyllie said all the English aristocracy name the first son after the father. Ross Senior said he was glad to have the sanction of the English aristocracy, as otherwise he knew that Dora wouldn't have given the boy his name. Junior was sickly, spoiled and a poor sport—so, naturally, his mother's darling.

About the time the Wyllie store began to expand,

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and Dora was agitating for removal from the little house on Market Street to one of the new stylish villas on Park Boulevard, the third Wyllie infant made its appearance. This time Dora triumphed. Eloise was the sugary, fancy name that Dora insisted on wishing on the newcomer, and Ross gave in at last, remarking savagely that he could at least thank heaven that his wife hadn't chosen Gladys, and, anyway, everyone would call the child Ella.

"Your temper gets worse all the time," said Dora Wyllie placidly. She could afford to be placid. She was getting the new house and the baby was to have the name she chose. Also she had been elected to the Clio Club and the Garden Club, and that meant a distinct social advance.

When you see a wife and mother of thirty-nine without a wrinkle or gray hair you are pretty sure to see a husband with plenty of both, and a perpetual worried look besides. In spite of his wife's social advance; in spite of his three children, who were good enough as children go; in spite of his flourishing retail store, the largest and most up-to-date in their flourishing city; and in spite of the fact that he was only forty-two years old himself, Ross Wyllie looked fifty-five—and a harassed, unhappy fifty-five at that. The answer for it lay in that he was driven by the implacable will, not his own. It was the will of his fair, plump, smiling, young-looking wife.

From the moment when she had chosen an engagement ring which was far beyond what he could afford, and elected for their honeymoon a resort where every hotel charged sky-high, she had driven him.

She was so sweet and appealing, her brown eyes were so innocent, she was so tearfully disappointed when he opposed objections to her extravagance, she was so wistfully covetous of the luxuries of life—what could he do but put on the harness? He was young and foolish and proud, and sure of himself, and wildly in love with this delicious little gimme. It took a long time to make him see her as she really was—a cold ruthless taskmaster, greedy for every material good of life. Oh, she was an excellent housekeeper, a careful mother, an agreeable hostess, a chaste wife; but sometimes, when he stirred wearily under the burden she had so artfully fitted on him, Ross Wyllie wished fervently that she was the opposite of all these things, so that he might have some legitimate claim to freedom. He had had too many years of keeping one jump ahead of his creditors.

Certainly it was all for his best good. How many, many times he had heard her say that. "I only want your best good"—that was the lash she used most often. It was for his best good that they take the bigger house, that they buy a car, another car—for her special use—that they entertain smartly, that the children go to private schools, that she should have rings and brooches and necklaces and furs to outshine every woman in town except Mrs. Purviance, wife of old Granite Purviance, the president of the First National. All the joy of developing and building up a big business had been denied Ross Wyllie, for everything he had done had been under pressure, forced by necessity. He knew just what would happen to him if a bad depression should come, tight

money, hard times. He knew! The lines in his face, the white hair on his temples, were the symbols of his knowledge.

And now it was Veevee's début. As to all fathers of girl children, it was incredible to Ross Wyllie that his baby had become a woman, that she must be introduced into society, and he could see no need of the great elaborate party, first of a program of dinners and dances and luncheons that Dora desired.

"She's been running round with the same crowd of young ones ever since she was in kindergarten," he objected. "She knows them all and they all know her. What's the use of putting on all this extra dog?"

"But everyone does it," said Dora. "Look at the parties Mrs. Tomlinson gave for Edna." Tomlinson had the rival store. "If we don't do as much, and more, people will think you can't afford it."

"I can't." Then Ross Wyllie permitted himself the unusual treat of a dig at his wife. "You forget that Mrs. Tomlinson's got money of her own to pay for her foolishness. I'll bet if Jake Tomlinson had been nicked for it, there'd've been no party."

"It's not my fault that I've no money, Ross," replied Mrs. Wyllie with dignity. "And it doesn't alter the fact that if we don't do as much for Veevee as the Tomlinsons did for Edna, people will think we can't afford it. I'm particularly anxious to give her a really perfect start because of Walter Purviance."

"For Pete's sake, Dora, what have you got in your head now? Trying to marry off that baby?"

"She's eighteen. I was eighteen when I married you."

"I've got nothing against Walter Purviance—he's a good boy as boys go nowadays—but I'd like Janie to have a real girlhood."

"She'll not have much chance unless she's launched properly." Mrs. Wyllie brought the conversation neatly back to the main issue. "It won't be so very expensive. I'll keep everything as reasonable as possible."

At this moment Genevieve-Janie—Veevee walked into the room. Ross Wyllie's tired eyes lit at the sight of her color, her straightness, her untouched glorious youth.

"Jane," he asked her, "is it necessary to your social success to have a big blow-out? Won't anybody dance with you or ask you anywhere unless we doll up the house and spend a lot of money for food nobody will eat, and music nobody'll listen to, and flowers that hardly last through the evening, and jam in so many people that nobody's comfortable? Can't you think up some easier way to get a string of beaux than that?"

Veevee grinned understandingly at her father, sat down on the arm of his chair and hugged him heartily.

"Pretty hard to win the suitors these days," she said. "The competition is sim-pully terrific! Specially if you've got nothing on your hip."

"Don't be so cheap," said her mother.

"Sorry, moms, but father asked. What with the girls that carry flasks and the girls that empty the boys' flasks, you've got to be up and doing if you want to make a dent on the stag line."

"Bad as all that, eh?" said Ross Wyllie. He loved

to hear Veevee rag her mother, though he wouldn't have dared openly to encourage her.

"Oh, quite. All the same, I don't care. If you can't scare up the shekels for a bust, dad, I'll—I'll just sort of leak out. Ooze out, maybe. How about it?"

"You'll do nothing of the sort. You are going to have everything that other girls in your position have. Your father knows very well that—"

"—that it's all for my best good. Yes, Dora." Ross Wyllie adjusted his harness, prepared for the pull. "Go as light as you can, though. Business is not what it ought to be, and shows no signs of getting any better."

"That's what you always say when you don't want to spend money," said Dora. "If you had your way, we'd still be living in that dump on Market Street, and the store would be the same as when you bought it."

"And my credit would be a whole lot better and I might have had some joy out of life," was on the tip of Ross Wyllie's tongue. But he didn't say it. There was never any use of saying things to Dora, and particularly he couldn't before Veevee. It wasn't good for children to hear their parents forever jangling, in Ross Wyllie's opinion; and as Dora had no such inhibition, he had to be the one to refrain from the jangles. There was his pride, his poor old battered pride—what there was left of it. He hated to have the children see that it was their mother who always had her way, rode him down in any stand he might take.

Then, too, she made him seem a carping tyrant, un-

willing to give them the pleasures and advantages that other girls and boys had. He knew that Dora had him at a disadvantage there. Naturally he wanted his children to have the best he could give them. It was only that he was so tired, so desperately, horribly tired of skating on thin ice; of going to the bank to get his notes extended, of putting off the wholesalers with instalments on account, with writing credit men humble and cajoling letters. The big Wyllie store was nothing but a mask, a great glittering luxurious mask, behind which he sweated and labored and contrived in a desperate mad haste lest the mask should crumble and reveal the truth.

When he went back to his office he sent for books, reports, though he knew perfectly well what he would find. Then he called in various heads of departments where sales had been slow, discussed with them methods of quickening. Lastly, his buyers—with warnings against overstocking.

"Buy close to demand," he said. "Don't let any clever salesman put anything over on us in the way of novelties. We've got to watch the turnover like hawks, and follow its trend."

Barton, his oldest and most dependable buyer, lingered. "Mr. Wyllie, I've just this morning heard a rumor that Tomlinson's negotiating for the Convex line. I got it through a man in the Tomlinson business office who's a distant cousin of mine."

Wyllie knew perfectly what that meant. He had dealt with the Convex wholesale house for years; he had been their exclusive customer in the city; their line was all staples, built up by national advertising,

for which his patrons asked by name. And on his desk there was a file of letters from the Convex credit manager covering a long period of time, and rising from a pianissimo of mild complaint to a crescendo of peremptory menacing demands. It all boiled down to this: If he didn't meet his bills they'd take their entire line away from him. But he hadn't thought they'd do it. He knew the reluctance with which a big wholesaler drops an old customer who is in temporary difficulties. Only he had rather overplayed that "temporary." The credit man's last had advised him that his difficulties seemed permanent instead of temporary and that they were about to take decisive steps. The negotiations with Tomlinson confirmed it.

Barton went on out—no need for him to say more—and Wyllie drummed on the desk. If he lost the Convex line the news would go straight through the trade and he'd lose other big staples. It was like knocking down the first in a line of blocks and seeing the whole row slowly topple. He went over his bank loans once more. If he could wangle an extension out of Purviance for the money due next month, he could make a substantial payment to Convex and steady his line of blocks. Veevee could even have her *début*—somewhat curtailed. It was after banking hours, but he put on his hat and went over to the First National. Old Granite Purviance would be there. Purviance worked in his little cubby-hole of an office longer hours than any of his junior clerks.

"I don't mind working, either," thought Wyllie bitterly, "but it's like laying up fairy gold—it turns to trash before my eyes."

Seated beside Purviance's desk, he went through the usual patter. The farmers were having a bad time and it was reflected in trade. He didn't see how things could pick up much before next spring. Still, business, though slow, was sound. There was nothing back of it all to worry about—he hoped that sounded convincing—it was just one of those times when the pendulum swings away. And so—that note, due next month—

Purviance looked him through and through. Wyllie could feel the old banker's intuition reaching into the hidden places of his mind, searching for the real motive behind the words. He seemed on the point of refusal, and Wyllie's heart gave a sick throb, warning of disaster. But Purviance, instead, rang for the note to be brought.

"You can't reduce it at all?" he asked at last. "You know, Wyllie, we've given you time twice before."

"I might bring it down a couple of thousand." Mentally he curtailed Veevee's party still further, stole a slice of the check he would send to the Convex. "That's not much, but I don't want to bring too much pressure on the farmers' accounts. You know how bad that is for everybody. It upsets the whole neighborhood."

"Yes, I know," agreed Purviance. "And 99 per cent of 'em are honest, and have got solid assets behind 'em. They only need a little time."

"Exactly." His heart beat less painfully now.

"We-ell, then, six months, with two thousand reduction. That's a very small reduction, Wyllie. Can't you do better than that? It ought to be five or six at least."

"Maybe I can when the note actually comes due. I'll try."

Lord, how rotten the whole thing was, this stalling and pretending! How he hated it! How tired, tired, tired he was! He felt like an old man as he went back to the store, wrote his letter to the Convex credit man. He tried to make it human and appealing.

I know we have been dilatory, but the whole situation here is peculiarly hard for the retail stores. I have just been talking with the president of our biggest bank, and he agrees with me that it is unwise to press too hard on the solid rural trade. The farmers have had a bad season and are behind with their payments and not buying much. I am making every sacrifice to meet your bills, because the good will of your firm and the long association mean much more to me than the average business connection. I appreciate your patience, your understanding, your coöperation more than I can tell you. The inclosed check—

He pared his bank balance to the bone in the amount of that check. Looking at the figures, he knew that he was on thinner ice than ever before. But where could he retrench? Not in salaries, not in wages, not in upkeep. He wished he dared reduce his own salary, but certain slips from the chief book-keeper warned him that he had already drawn ahead. Not for himself—it was that big house; the parade that Dora loved, must have. He got nothing out of it except a roof over his head, his food—and an overwhelming load of worry and care. He was the pack horse, galled, weighted, whipped on mercilessly.

He dragged his mind away from such futile im-

ages. Such thinking did no good, weakened him for the work he must do. He had won a breathing space and time to turn round. Trade might pick up, and at least he had tightened everything, all through the organization. He might lay off a few of the clerks, but he hated doing that. Before he could ever resolve to let an employee go, he went into the case personally—did he or she have a home or any savings, any other chance to get a job? A man or a woman with dependents, responsibilities, could not be turned out just so—that was the rule in the Wyllie store, and it was a rule Ross Wyllie had made himself, and rigorously enforced.

In the evening he spoke once more to Dora: "Cut down on Janie's party as much as you can. I'm in a very tight place."

Dora had shrugged her shoulders. "You always say that, Ross. It's your stock excuse."

But later Veevee had drifted into the library where he sat reading. "Father, here's your angel child. Tell me something, will you?"

"I thought you young people knew it all."

"Oh, we do; but now and then we put up a front of deferring to our elders."

"When you want a favor, I suppose."

"Righto!" They smiled at each other with perfect comprehension. "You know, I'd like this party awf'ly, but I heard what you said to mother. If it's going to cramp your style—seriously, I mean—I'd rather not have it. I should care what Edna Tomlinson does, or anybody else!"

He was infinitely touched, but he would not show it.

"I wish you'd try to speak the English language," he scolded.

"I do—modern style."

She smiled again, pursing her red lips naughtily. He looked at her with loving exultation. A beautiful, untouched, untamed young thing.

"You're going to have your party, Miss Modern Style, but don't pile it on too hard, that's all."

"Honest Injun, cross your heart, it's all right?"

"Honest Injun, cross my heart. You know, Janie, this is an expensive establishment to keep up, and there's Junior's school bills, and Ella's. It makes a pretty staggering total." It was the first time he had ever said so much to her. She looked bewildered.

"But I thought we had lots and lots of money. Mother always says so."

"Your mother doesn't understand business. When trade's brisk and people buy freely, we have plenty. But trade's light now, people aren't buying much. It makes things hard for me. The store costs just as much to run in hard times as good ones. This is very elementary, you understand."

"I think it's thrilling. What do you do for money when trade's bad?"

He looked at her, wondering. He knew that Dora had a mind like a sieve and he had long ago stopped telling her much about his business, lest she broadcast it at every tea and bridge, so it was peculiarly comforting to talk to Janie, to feel her interest. It lifted the weight a little, eased his harness.

"When times are hard I borrow money from the bank to tide me over until things pick up again."

"At Walter's father's bank?" And when she said Walter's name she blushed—a rare, lovely, betraying blush, but her eyes met her father's bravely.

"She loves that boy," he thought, "and she hardly knows it herself." She had grown up, his little Janie; she had found her woman's heart. It made him feel lonely and wistful and very tender for her. "Yes, at the First National," he said carelessly.

The doorbell rang, faint, far away. She reverted instantly to her eager girlishness.

"How funny! I'll bet a nickel that's Walter this minute. We're going over to Edna's to dance—a whole crowd's going. . . . Oh, you didn't say if you like my dress."

She shook out her draperies of scarlet chiffon, pinched at the gold flower on her shoulder. Her father understood that she was wondering if Walter Purviance would like it, was asking for reassurance. He had seen his grandmother once dressed in wine-red corded silk and she had dropped the little boy he was a playful curtsy and asked him how she looked. So he spoke to Janie in the words he had used then: "You look fine."

She hardly heard him; she was already at the door, as if the presence of Walter Purviance drew her toward him. Then her father heard her voice in the hall, the young man's voice answering, their concerted laughter. Against his will, he thought, "If she marries him it'll be a good thing for me. Purviance will be easier to deal with." He saw with shame that he had sunk to looking for advantage to himself in his girl's happiness.

But even while he rebuked himself, the incident cheered him, seemed to promise something for the future.

He began the next morning an even closer watch on the store's business than was his custom. He prowled among the departments, observed the feeble spurts of trade in bargain sales, harried the window trimmers and reluctantly cut down his sales and office force as much as he dared. If he let too many people go it would start bad rumors. He made small savings where he could—of coal, electricity, phone service, office and washroom supplies. Every cent he saved, he argued grimly, was worth a nickel in the present depression. He put a little extra pressure on overdue accounts. But in the aggregate it did not amount to much. He held his own, that was all. The depression had become general, and all his savings and scrimpings no more than kept him going. He didn't gain an inch, and he was unpleasantly aware that he had spread a spirit of gloomy uncertainty all through the store. Well, let 'em gloom. He couldn't help that.

There were a few lifts—the Convex credit man had replied satisfactorily, though he didn't spill over himself to be gracious. He was giving the Wyllie store more than a fair chance, but he said frankly that their future relations depended on Wyllie. All the same, Barton reported that the negotiations with Tomlinson were suspended. That was a real triumph.

He had been so absorbed, so intensely wrapped round with his contrivings and plannings for the store that he had ceased to think about his family. In the morning he had his breakfast and was gone before

Dora and Janie appeared; he lunched in his office on milk and crackers, and by night he was too tired, too withdrawn, to notice much. The two women talked, if they were there, but he was only with them in body. His mind perpetually ran through a round of figures, grinning hateful figures, each one with its little taunting dollar mark, each one pulling at him, draining him. After dinner he would go into the library with his trade reports, his papers, and work there until exhaustion drove him up to bed.

One morning as he started from his private office to the bookkeeping department he heard a shrill voice behind a stack of files denouncing him:

"Yes, nagging us about every letter clip and rubber band we use; but he can throw it around like nothing for his daughter's party—that's what gets me. We're the goats, down here at the store, while Miss Genevieve Wyllie makes her grand daybew like she was Princess of Wales or something." The voice said his daughter's name mockingly, malice and envy in it.

Ross Wyllie closed the door and went back to his private office. He had been so engrossed—he was so unaccustomed to having any help or coöperation from Dora in any difficulty—he hadn't thought—yet he had warned her, he knew he had warned her. Ah, but he had warned her before. He looked about him helplessly. How could he find out, who would tell him—his glance fell on the morning papers, and he opened them, hunted up the page he never read, never looked at even casually—the society columns. Weddings, receptions, engagements—he ran quickly over them, then his own name jumped at him:

"The whole social world and the younger set in particular is all agog over the coming début of Miss Genevieve Wyllie, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Ross Wyllie, of 404 Park Boulevard. A little bird has whispered it about that it will be the most elaborate and beautiful entertainment ever given for a local bud. Miss Wyllie, ever since her return from school, has been a great favorite among the sub-debs, and there is every reason to believe that this popularity will be enhanced when she makes her formal bow to the oldsters of society, where her mother, Mrs. Ross Wyllie, has so long been one of the leading figures. Miss Wyllie's début party will be the first in a series given in her honor, and will inaugurate what promises to be the gayest season our city has ever seen."

It was only the conventional patter of the society editor, but Ross Wyllie felt sure Dora had herself dictated it, and left it indefinite so that, should he see it, he would feel no alarm. But its very vagueness was sinister. What had she been up to? He called his house on the telephone, but one of the maids reported that Mrs. Wyllie would not be in until half-past eleven. He was too restless, too uneasy to wait, so he took his hat and coat and went home. On the way he had ample time for self-reproach. He ought to have kept an eye on Dora, too, while he was watching the letter clips and rubber bands. He ought to have given her just so much and forced her to make it do. But he knew she wouldn't have paid the least attention—there would have been the usual aftermath of bills. Dora with cash in her hand had always spent it at least three times. This time, though—this time when

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he had been so urgent— Oh, well, what was the use?

Once in the house, he went straight to Dora's room, to her desk. A young woman, strange to Ross Wyllie, was working there, with boxes of stationery heaped around her.

"Mrs. Wyllie hired me to address the invitations for Miss Genevieve's début, Mr. Wyllie," she explained. "I'm Teresa Kugel—my sister works in your book-keeping department."

Very probably it was her sister, then, who had made the gibe he had heard in the morning.

"If you'll excuse me, I'm looking for a paper Mrs. Wyllie has here," he said, and Teresa stood aside.

A sizable bunch of papers rewarded his search. He took them downstairs to the library.

There was the caterer's estimate, the florist's, the orchestra. All were out-of-town firms, all were staggeringly high. There was an item from the modiste—"with real lace two hundred and fifty; with imitation, two hundred"—and there was an unexpected memo that had nothing to do with the party. It appeared that Dora had secretly bought a small sport car for Junior, had made a very small cash payment and was being dunmed nastily for the balance of more than five hundred dollars! A boy not quite seventeen, at prep school, with a car of his own! Of all the insane folly, the bad judgment! As if Junior wasn't already spoiled enough, inattentive to his studies! His anger rose, and his shame. As Dora came in he called to her. She looked wonderfully well, her cheeks pink from the fresh air, a rose pinned in the fur of her collar.

"What's the matter, that you're home this time of the day?" she asked. "I hope you're not sick."

"This is the matter." He showed her what he had taken from her desk.

Her color deepened, her eyes sparkled with instant anger. "Since when have you been rummaging in my private papers? I think that's low—I think it's positively indecent."

He tried not to let his own emotion show, to hold himself checked, cool, for he knew he needed his self-control.

"Dora, this is serious. I wasn't fooling when I said you must cut down on the expense of Janie's party. I'm in a desperate situation. Do you want to see me go bankrupt, to lose the store, to lose this house? That's what it means unless you call a halt to your extravagance. These estimates are enormous—and then this car for Junior. Why didn't you tell me about that?"

"For the very same reason I didn't tell you about the estimates—I knew you'd begin the same old yammer-yammer-yammer about expense again. Besides, you're never fair to Junior. All the boys he goes with have cars but him. I'm not going to see my son at a disadvantage. Those hateful old auto people will get paid in time. I was only waiting until after Veevee's *début*, when I could save something out of the house money and give it to them. Good heavens, it's not any pleasure to me, Ross, to have to do things behind your back, and to have people writing and telephoning about bills! But you're so unreasonable, and particularly about Junior."

"I don't mean to be unreasonable. I want the children to have everything I can give them, but there's a limit. These bills here"—he waved them at her—"and these estimates amount roughly to fifteen hundred dollars. And there's the five hundred you owe on that car—two thousand dollars—which happens to be the exact amount I need to keep my credit good at the bank. It's due in a couple of days. Don't you understand? It's vital that I reduce those notes. I really, seriously, mean, Dora, that if I don't I may be bankrupt by the time Janie's party's over."

"You are perfectly absurd. You know very well we're not going bankrupt. As to business, or credit or notes and all that sort of stuff, I don't pretend to understand about them. Very funny, your needing the exact amount I planned to spend—"

He caught her by the wrist. "Dora, it's not so funny as you think. Stop this nonsense and listen to me. You can understand anything you want to, and you'd better get this through your head right this minute—that if you give this party it'll probably be the last you'll ever give. This house will go, the business will go, Junior's car and your car will go. We'll have to go back to the house on Market Street and I'll have to begin all over again. Your diamond pin and rings will have to go, the silver, the furniture—"

She wrenched away from him. "You must be crazy, to think you can scare me with such stuff as that! You say very probably it'll be the last party I'll give—that lets you out. Then after I've given up this party and taken poor little Junior's only pleasure away from him, you'll suddenly find that it was only

a false alarm and you're all right after all. I haven't lived with you all these years not to know you perfectly, Ross Wyllie. Now I'm going—I'll be late for my engagement as it is, listening to your silly stuff. And I give you fair warning that if you keep on worrying me and making life so perfectly impossible, I'll leave you—and take the children with me!"

The door banged behind her and Ross Wyllie stood staring at its handsome mahogany panels. With harsh self-reproach, he realized his own cowardice, his own futility, his own weakness. Dora was stronger than he; he had always known it; but never before had he felt it so bitterly. He was helpless against her. He would have to yield. Not that he was afraid of having her leave him—he knew that threat for its proper worth, which was exactly nothing. What she was counting on was the hell on earth she would make for him unless what she wanted was forthcoming. And she was counting on that lack in him which made it impossible for him to be as merciless as she was, as hard, as grasping for what she wanted. She would poison the children against him, she would nag and cry and sneer. In his weakness, his loneliness of spirit, he yearned toward his children. He loved them so tenderly, they were solace for so much.

He went back to the store, shut himself in his office. He had bent once more to the lash, he was still the pack horse, staggering under his burden, but moving on. With infinite care he began to draft a letter to Purviance—he didn't have the nerve to face him again—to sound out the bank's attitude if the promised reduction of the note wasn't made. Trade had not

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picked up, everything looked bad, he didn't want to lay off any more clerks, and so on and so on—excuses, promises, hopes. But he wrote with a divided mind. He was still sore from his knuckling under to Dora. Why hadn't he played the man, forced her to do what he wished against her will, if she wouldn't do it to help him in his need? Why hadn't he outblustered and outbullied her own blusterings and bullyings? Why was he such a coward when it came to her?

It wasn't in him, he thought. There was something of cold steel lacking in his makeup that she had. His hand, holding the pencil, twitched with nerves, ached with tension. If he but had an ally now, if he had someone to stand by him, someone who could impress Dora with the truth of what he had told her! He was ashamed that he should need outside assistance, but he longed for it. But there wasn't a soul. Perhaps Janie would; but he sheered away in horror of dumping his burden on a child's slender shoulders, of dimming Janie's happiness, and perhaps making her lose faith and affection for him. He'd be a pitiable object to his daughter. He couldn't bear that. He must still turn and twist and contrive—maybe there would be some way out of it all.

He called in his secretary and dictated to her the letter he had written in longhand. Presently she brought it to him, typed, and he re-read it. By a tremendous effort he concentrated on it, made a few careful changes, pointed up a phrase here and there, softened the darker side. It must appear that he was a confident patron writing to one who would be only

too glad to oblige, not a beggar with hand held out. He hated himself anew. It seemed as if his whole life had become nothing but this writing of letters for money, for credit, for time. And in his heart he had no hope. Disaster was at his heels; he was only eluding it by hours, by minutes, so long as Dora—

He signed and sent off the second draft of the letter. He'd know to-morrow. "The condemned man is granted a reprieve of twenty-four hours before he goes to the chair," was his inward comment. Then he shook himself. This wouldn't do. Old Purviance was not a fool—he'd know what a blow it would be to the city, to the whole community, to have Wyllie's go to the wall. He'd think of that—they couldn't afford to have a big smash just now—it would be bad for the bank. People would say "Why, I thought the First National was behind Wyllie's"—and the bank would suffer in prestige and patronage.

When he went home at night, Janie, again in her scarlet chiffon, was waiting for him in the hall. Lovely, glowing Janie. She pretended to scold him.

"Were you sick this morning that you came home? I didn't know about it until Ada told me, just a couple of minutes ago, so I came down to wait for you. She said you'd gone right back. You don't look so very well. And I don't know—I got worried. Here, I'll hang up your coat."

"I'm all right. Let's sit down and talk a little. What have you been up to all day?"

"Oh, working hard, licking stamps on the party invitations. Teresa had to go home to-day; her mother was sick. So little Veevee got very busy."

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"Overworked terribly, I suppose."

"You're always razzing me, dad. You think I'm perfectly useless, I bet. I can do heaps of things you don't imagine. And you're very smartly changing the subject. Aren't you well? You looked so white and so tired—I wish you'd take a nice long rest. Why don't you?"

Her solicitude warmed him. Again the suggestion came to him that he should tell her, get her to stand by him in this crisis. But it seemed such a tremendous chance to take, and he was, as she had seen, so tired. No, he wouldn't tell her. He wouldn't unpack his load on her, dim her radiance, blight her gayety, take away the precious irresponsibility of her youth. The irony of her suggestion made him smile.

"Maybe I shall be able to take a rest a little later," he said. "I wouldn't be at all surprised. But I'm really all right, and you're not to worry, my girl. . . . What are you all dressed up for to-night—and in this dress I like?"

"All the boys like it," declared Veevee, with intentional mischief. "That's why I wear it so much. I thought it out myself. You know, dad, a red-headed girl always has lots of suitors, so as long as I couldn't change my hair, I thought I'd see what a red dress would do."

"And has it worked?"

"I'm not complaining." She was demure now.

He put a gentle finger against the velvet of her cheek. "Does Walter Purviance like it?" he asked.

"O—oh, that's a leading question."

"Leading where?"

"Now, dad, stop teasing. Walter's all right. We're going to a party to-night, just a little one. Oh, dad, isn't my party going to be perfectly glorious? I'm so thrilled I can hardly wait. What a darling dear lamb you are to let me have it!"

"Janie, it appears to me I'm not the only one who can change the subject. I was not talking of your party."

She rose and shook a finger at him. "I hear the gong, and you are not ready for dinner. Hustle up or you won't get any soup."

"Then you won't tell me anything about Walter?"

She stopped and looked up at him; her eyes were stars of joy. "There's nothing to tell—yet."

Then, like a child suddenly overcome with bashfulness, she ran away from him into the dining-room. Ross Wyllie squared his shoulders. Janie was worth carrying the pack for at least. He pushed back his anxiety for the thousandth time. These alternating moods racked his nerves, left him unsteady, shaken, yet he could not have endured the constant depths of fear and dread. Even so, he was near hysteria.

What would Purviance say? Would he be convinced, or would he shrivel the half-hearted arguments that Wyllie had presented? If he refused, what would be his next move? He forgot about Janie as he stumbled through these questions, and he looked about him strangely. The gracious wide dining-room across the hall, with its soft lights, its tinted glass, its polished silver, the silent, efficient services of the maids, the delicate food—strange surroundings for a man so near disaster. He looked at it all wearily—it cost too much,

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it cost too much. It cost his strength, his peace, his finest honesty—too much, more than he had any right to give, far, far more than any material comfort was worth.

In the morning he went through his mail hungrily. There was no letter from Purviance. Well, that might be a good omen, or a bad. He had no means of knowing. In mid-morning, though, there came a message: "Mr. Purviance asks if you could come over to the bank."

"Tell him," said Wyllie, "that I'll be over in about half an hour." He spoke calmly, but the muscle in his cheek below the left eye jerked uncontrollably.

He walked back and forth in his office, marshaling his strength, shaping arguments to convince, and in half an hour he appeared at the bank.

Purviance was more cordial than he had been on his last visit. Had Wyllie been less stressed with his own emotion he would have seen signs of a strange embarrassment on that granite countenance. The banker hardly knew how to begin. He chewed the end of his cigar, twiddled his fingers, looked out of the window.

"You know, Wyllie," he said at last, "they say a man's got no secrets from his priest and his doctor—and I guess they might add his banker to that list." He waited, turned a curious purplish red and swung round straight to the other man. "Say, d'you know where Mrs. Wyllie was yesterday?" He did not wait for an answer, but blurted on: "Maybe you'll think it's pretty raw of me to talk to you about your wife. I had a battle to make up my mind to do it, but this is what happened. Yesterday she sat beside Mrs.

Purviance at some woman's lunch, and she was kind of upset and excited, and finally she opened up to Lilah, and she said you'd been making an awful fuss about this début party for your daughter, and other expenses, and that she wasn't going to pay any attention, because you always talked like that, and anyway, you always came through in the end with what she wanted. And Lilah came home and told me—and it let in a great big light on a lot of things."

He paused a moment, but Wyllie did not speak. He could not. He was choked with his abasement, his betrayal. He could hear Dora, see her petty indignation. Oh, the fool—the fool he had been! He knew her so well. There was no excuse.

"I've always thought, Wyllie," went on Purviance, "and I guess a lot of other people have, that this extravagant way you live was as much your doing as your wife's. But with what Mrs. Purviance told me, and other little hints I've had here and there, I came to the conclusion that—it's true a man's worst foes are in his own household. You seem to be able to manage your business pretty well, but at home you—you seem to have kind of let your wife run away with you. Isn't that so, Wyllie?"

"Yes, it's true," said Ross Wyllie in a low voice.

"And it looks like pretty poor policy to me, in these hard times, for you to splurge with a big party for your daughter and buy your boy a motor car when you can't meet your bank loans."

"She doesn't understand—I can't make her understand." He could say no more without accusing Dora, betraying her worse than she had betrayed him.

Purviance was watching him. "If you'll ask her to come down here and talk to me, I'll guarantee to make her understand. Wyllie, it's bad dope—this party. You've not even the excuse of helping local trade; everything's ordered from out of town—music, flowers, even the caterer."

So Dora had told that too! What could he say?

"And I've just this much to add: You've got to reduce that note, and pretty substantially. You can do it if you retrench at home. I'm making no complaint about what you've done in your business—there I know you're all right. But if you can't be master in your own house, if you're going to let the money run out the spigot faster'n you can pour it in at the bung, you're a bad bet. The next thing'll be to require an indorser on all your paper."

"But—you don't mean that! That means—"

"I know what it means as well as you. It's up to you. If you've got the nerve to do at home what you've done at the store, you'll be all right."

Wyllie looked about him haggardly. "I haven't got the nerve," he said in a loud, harsh voice. "I've tried everything I know. I can't make my wife see. She won't see. Don't you think I've tried?"

"Hey, take it easy!" said Purviance. "I think so—of course I know you're no fool. Well, as I said, maybe if I spoke to Mrs. Wyllie—sometimes a word from outside, you know—it's no pleasure to me, you know, but to help you. I don't want to see you go to the wall, Wyllie. It would be an awful jolt all through the community. But I believe it's better in the end than this

eternal running on a shoe string. You telephone to Mrs. Wyllie—let's get this over."

He pushed the telephone over toward Ross Wyllie. It had come then, the aid he had so needed, so longed for, the fortuitous outside aid which would strengthen him, arm him, make Dora see what he could never show her. He lifted the receiver, gave the number mechanically: "Main 2658." And then suddenly, decisively, he hung up. "No, I won't! If I can't do it myself—if I'm so far gone, such a poor boob—"

He got up and looked at Purviance. "You'll hear from me later in the day," he said, and walked out.

It was the unconcealed contempt, the pity in Purviance's tone, the condescension of his phrase that had done it. "Let me manage your life, since you're not up to it," it had implied. "You've sunk pretty low to need me, but somebody's got to drag you out of this mess, for the good of the community." The acid sting of it, the utter desperation of it, had reached something in him unstirred before.

His backbone felt like steel, his mind was clear and hard and cruel. Deal with a fool according to his folly. And Dora was a fool—as big a fool as he himself had been. Had been! He used the past tense, assuredly.

He walked into the house and straight up the stairs. In Dora's room, Teresa Kugel was piling up a great basketful of square white envelopes.

"You can give those to me, if they're finished," said Ross Wyllie. He took the basket, went downstairs to the cellar and stuffed the envelopes in the furnace. It made him feel like laughing as he watched the edges

sear and curl and blaze. "I ought to have made Dora steam off the stamps," he thought drolly.

As he came upstairs with the empty basket he met Dora, hastening down. "What are you doing? Teresa said you'd taken the invitations—"

"I've just burned them up. There isn't going to be any party. Now I'm going to wire to everyone you've engaged things from and let them know."

"Ross Wyllie, have you gone crazy?" It was so unexpected, so violent a surprise, that she was not ready with her lash.

"I told you yesterday, I warned you. You wouldn't listen. So I've had to act. And about Junior's car—I'll telephone the people you bought it from to go and get it."

"You will not! You wouldn't dare! Ross Wyllie, I told you something yesterday. I warned you. I'll leave you!"

He felt like laughing again. "But what will you live on? You'll simply make me advertise in all the papers that my wife, Dora Wyllie, having left my bed and board, I hereby warn the public that I refuse to be responsible for any debts she may contract. Would you like that?"

"You wouldn't dare!" She said it again, but her tone lacked conviction. He was so cheerfully cynical, so careless, it impressed her more than earnestness. This was a new Ross Wyllie, with a will as sharp-edged as her own.

"But what am I going to do? Everyone knows that the invitations were to go out to-day. I've already told the society editor that they—"

Dora, asking what she should do! A miracle!

"It doesn't matter what you do. But there aren't any invitations and there won't be any party. And if you've got other extravagances in mind, better countermand them before I do. To-night I'm going over all the accounts of this house and we'll see where we stand. We're going to cut down everywhere."

"But the children—Veevee'll be heart-broken!"

"Janie's better stuff than that. Now, Dora, listen! You're up against it. You say I'm always crying wolf, pretending that I'm in financial trouble. But remember, in the fairy tale, the wolf finally came. The wolf has come. Either we cut down and save every cent we can or we go bankrupt. If you don't believe me, go down to the First National and talk to old Granite Purviance."

He was not above mentioning his ally, now that the first skirmish of the battle was won. If he could defeat Dora once he could do it again. He could and he would—endlessly, if need be.

"Well, you always make such a fuss. How was I to know?" demanded Dora. "But if we've got to—"

"We've got to," he interjected grimly.

"I suppose I could give it out that Aunt Martina's very sick—she's not well—and she lives so far away. On account of the serious illness of a near relative —yes, that would do."

"Save your face if you want to. I won't stop that. And better be getting things straight for me to-night. I've got to go back to the store now. No funny business or tricks behind my back remember. Wait, get me the addresses of the people you've been dealing

. PACK HORSE .

with—for the party, I mean. I'll send those telegrams myself."

In a curious dazed fashion she gave him what he wished. He tucked the paper in his pocket, walked out and shut the door behind him.

He wanted to wave his arms and shout. He wanted to sing. Oh, he wasn't through with it yet! There'd be a long hard way to go, a steep way. Dora was only temporarily conquered. He'd never be able to change her nature, but he could control her acts.

Pack horse? Huh!

THE END





